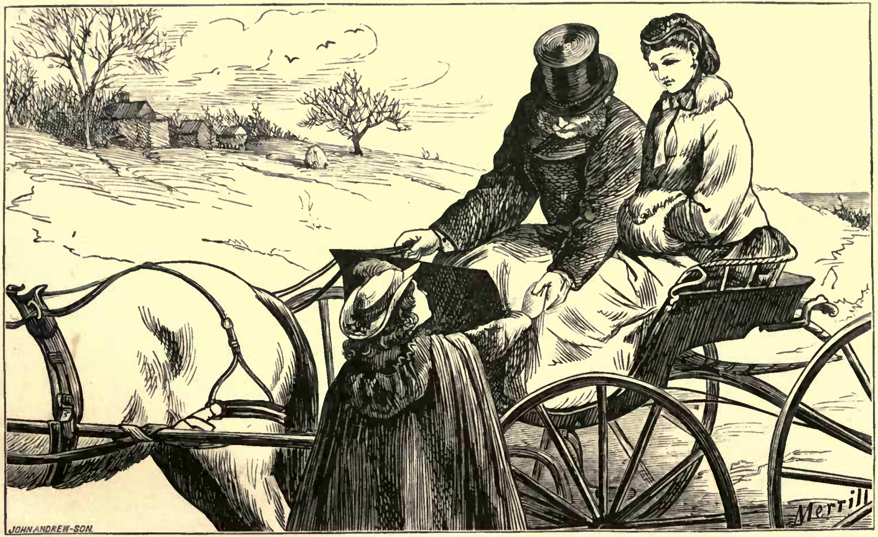
Merrill
JOHN ANDREW-SON

THE

MILLS OF TUXBURY.

BY

VIRGINIA F. TOWNSEND,

AUTHOR OF

"The Hollands," "Deerings of Medbury," "Six in All," etc.

> Consider this,
> That in the course of justice none of us
> Should see salvation: we do pray for Mercy,
> And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
> The deeds of mercy.
>
> Merchant of Venice.

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THE MILLS OF TUXBURY.

CHAPTER I.

A DAY drawing toward sunset, late in the autumn, and a landscape — I want you to see it just as I once saw it, to feel, as I did, its weird power take hold upon you with a spell, half a terror and half a fascination.

Nothing here of sunshine and clover blossoms, of wide, green swells of June leaves, and fresh, tender scents clinging to the air; yet there was a wonderful magnetism in that landscape, which some human faces seem to possess, not always the brightest or fairest.

Afar in the distance was a cold, blue rim of sea, and nearer, the river, whose low banks overflowed every day when the great salt tides ran inland; then the lonely, picturesque road, with the tall mass of bare, reddish-gray rock on one side and the thick woods on the other.

Everything had a dismal, worn-out look. The grand play of the year was over, and nothing now remained but wreck and débris; lights and color all drowned out in the harsh, rasping breath of November; the sky wore its old, thick wrinkles of gray clouds; the earth, that cold, sickly pallor which comes over it when her face settles down in waiting for its shroud of snows.

The road, creeping along at the foot of that dark, vast pile in a way that would have made an artist hanker for brush and palette, curved around the rocks and then went in a zigzag, uncertain way through the woods for half a mile, winding past hollows and gullies choked with damp and darkness now, whatever they might be in summer, and coming out upon a worm-eaten, rotten old bridge that crossed the river, — the road kept on through upward swells of pasture and meadows until, three miles off, and a dozen from the coast, it struck the hills, in one of whose valleys stood the great smelting furnaces of Tuxbury, in another the cotton factories which formed the principal material features of the wide, sluggish old town in northern New England. I am not certain whether you can find this place on the map, but no matter; you can find plenty of towns just like it.

Round the curve of the rocks into the road there came suddenly this afternoon a small figure in a mantle of gray water-proof, a little scarlet scarf, and a coarse straw hat, with a bit of scarlet plume in the front of that also.

As a low, menacing gust of wind swept through the narrow opening betwixt rock and forest, the girl lifted up her face and shivered a little, drawing the water-proof closer about her, with one hand cased in a brown cotton glove.

It was not a handsome face, — sun-browned and a little too peaked for even health, much less beauty, —

but it was a clear, honest, wholesome face. There were force, life, character in it, which so many pretty faces want. If the cheeks lacked bloom, the lips and eyes made up for that, — the one a brighter scarlet than the checkerberries in the hollows of the woods, and the other full of a warm, steady light.

Berry Shumway was going home from her day's work in the factory. She was fifteen years old, but her general appearance gave you an impression that she was much younger than she really was; at least when the old worried look did not come into her face, quenching the light in the dark eyes and making the scarlet lips quiver; but it slipped off and on, as worries are apt to over warm, helpful little souls like that of Berry Shumway's.

It was a strange name, people thought, or said if they were of the blunt, outspoken pattern, taking it for the first time between their lips. The fact was, she had another name, although nobody ever thought of that now; indeed, nobody perhaps had even heard of it, except her brother. She had one, ten years older than herself, these two being the last of the family. The father had been one of the better class of operatives in a small English manufacturing town, and had crossed the ocean with his household to better his fortunes. These did not prosper in the New World. The climate treated him unkindly, and sickness and poverty broke the man down, soul and body.

Those were miserable years of struggling and suffering, living from hand to mouth; the Wolf, that awful

Wolf of Poverty, with its gaunt face and hungry eyes, always at the door.

At last the Englishman died, and his little, faded, toil-worn wife shivered out of life a little later.

I think Berry got what was best in her from her mother, yet she had more native force than a half-a-dozen of either parents. From the mother, too, she had her name, — a happy inspiration that came to the woman one day as she kissed the small scarlet mouth of her baby, and remembered the glitter of red berries among the old hedgerows of the far-off English home; and thereafter, for good or for evil, the child's name was Berry.

So much for the antecedents of the girl. As she comes up the road, the bits of color about her and the glow which the long walk and the sharp winds have brought into her face, in contrast with the dingy grays and browns of the landscape, make her look prettier than she really is. Some pleasant thought comes into her face, and suddenly — she is a quick, wiry, nervous little thing from head to foot — she first drops down on the stone, draws out of her pocket a small, faded, blue silk purse and shakes out the money in her hand, — a little heap of silver; it was at least two years before the war, — and two or three bank-bills, ragged at the edges.

Berry counted it all over carefully. It had been pay-day at the factory that afternoon. "Eight dollars!" she said to herself, and a little, pleased smile came about her mouth. It seemed a large amount of money to the factory-girl, — nearly three weeks of daily toil had gone into that sum. She drew a long, pleased sigh. "I can have my new shawl now," she said to herself, — "the crimson-clouded one with the heavy fringe. How warm and pretty it will be! If it wasn't so late, I might go over and get it this very night; but then there's Hardy's supper. I could send him, but he'd be sure to get the wrong one. Men never know. Eight dollars! What a heap of money that is!" her eyes gloating wide over it.

Somebody heard the last words, and somebody caught sight of the quaint little figure sitting down there on a stone in the road. It was a man on a large, spirited bay horse, himself probably not far into his thirties, a heavy overcoat buttoned up close to the throat, a pleasant, intelligent face, with brown beard and hair.

The girl, absorbed in her money, did not hear the horse's hoofs in the dry sand. A comical expression came across the man's face. Seeing that, you would know that he relished a joke; and anybody who knew the stranger could have told you that he was a generous, impulsive fellow. He slid carefully off his animal now, thrust his hand into his pocket, and, stepping up softly to the girl, laid a five-dollar bill down on her knee by the little pile there.

"That will make the heap a little larger," he said, replying only to her last words, which were all he had overheard.

"Oh!" A little start, and the girl looked up and saw the gentleman's face with the twinkle in his eyes. It was his turn to be surprised now, for as he caught sight of the little, drooping, cloaked figure on the stone, he had fancied it belonged to a child of not more than ten years. Something was scarlet beside Berry's lips then, and color always made her look well. "I — I thank you," she stammered, "but I — I don't like to take the money."

Had the girl turned out a princess in disguise, Benjamin Whitmarsh had native tact enough to get himself gracefully out of any scrape in which his careless generosity and love of fun had plunged him.

"This girl had seen a baker's dozen of birthdays, perhaps, when he had counted on several behind that, and had, it appeared, been well enough brought up to feel that it was not just the thing to take money from strangers on the road."

All this flashing through the young man's mind in a breath, he patted the girl on the shoulder in a most grandfatherly fashion. "Oh, never mind me, child!" he said. "I'm such a venerable old gentleman that I sometimes take it into my head to do things out of the ordinary way; and you must just think of me as a real Santa Claus whom you met on the road a little ahead of his time, and who had a right to see that you had something to put in your stocking against Christmas. Good-by," lifting his hat. Politeness was such an instinct with Benjamin Whitmarsh that, to his honor be it said, he would have used the very same ceremony to a barefooted beggar; and then he sprang on his horse before Berry Shumway could gather up those bright, scattered little wits of hers into one word.

"Can you tell me if this is the road to Tuxbury Mills?" asked the gentleman.

"Yes, sir; keep to your right until you cross the bridge, and then turn to the left."

"Thank you, child." He galloped away the next moment and left Berry all alone in the road, without giving her time to say one word more about the money, which she had fully intended to do.

She walked on rapidly now, thinking over the singular event which had just happened to her. It had altogether an air of romance which struck her imagination. She was too young yet to feel any heart-flutterings or build any air-castles out of the thing; and beside that, Berry understood her position perfectly, and the wide gulf there was between her and the gracious, handsome gentleman; at least he seemed the latter in her eyes.

"He must have thought I was a very little girl, and I'm almost fifteen," she said to herself, a smile coming into the small, brown, quaint face. Then she opened her hand and looked at the money, and smoothed out the edge of the bank-note. Order was an instinct with the girl.

Then she fell to thinking of the new hat which lay in this windfall, as sudden and strange as though it had dropped right down from one of those lowering clouds in the sky. She pleased herself thinking of the bright flutter of ribbons, and of the one rosebud on which her heart had been set. She had a hankering after fresh, pretty things, such as she saw in the store windows; and really I have known a good many elegant women no wiser than this poor, foolish, little factory girl, who counted her dimes and hoarded her pennies so carefully in order to buy her bits of bright-colored ribbons and snowy laces.

"That was dreadfully funny what he said about Santa Claus, too. Did he really s'pose I'd believe it, I wonder?" the smile broadening about the large, sensitive, scarlet mouth into a merry little laugh. "Grand folks al'ays talk in that way, I guess. It must be very nice, so different from our ways;" and a little gravity or regret came up slowly into the smile.

"I wonder" — a moment later, playing with the fringes of the little blue purse while she talked — "what Hardy would say to all this? I'm almost afraid to tell him, for he's funny sometimes, and there's no knowing how things will strike him; he might say, 'Fine gentlemen like that have no business to be givin' big presents to little girls they meet in the road. You'd better have flung it back in his face.'

"And then, though I know it was all right from the way the gentleman looked and spoke, I might not make Hardy think so, for he's dreadful set, Hardy is."

The road wound now through a long stretch of half-cleared land, the charred, unsightly trunks giving a peculiarly dismal effect to the landscape; and at last Berry came upon the settlements of factory operatives, the low, unpainted buildings huddled together in a slipshod fashion that too often suggested anything but order and comfort inside. It is true there was a wide difference in the air of the houses, for the settlement of perhaps a thousand people in all, represented at least a half-dozen different nationalities, — German, Welsh, Scotch, English, with a plentiful interfusion of Celts.

The larger proportion of the front yards had a slatternly, unkempt appearance, the ground strewn with masses of decaying weeds, and bits of broken crockery, and heaps of dirt; while others flaunted even now a few hardy marigolds and dahlias, which had weathered the frosts, and, though a good deal chilled and faded, still carried a hint of the summer.

Behind every one of the doors in that hive of operatives there was poverty, but with some there were order and neatness, and with others unthrift and slatternliness. Berry paused before one of the smallest houses, a little apart from the others. There could not have been at the farthest more than four rooms inside that little unpainted shell. The square of front yard, however, was as clean as possible. A morning-glory vine was flaunting a few of its withered leaves before the windows, and there were bunches of phlox still holding out a few white blossoms like stray snow-flakes. Garden pinks and sweet-williams must have made a brave show in that square plot of soil every summer. Everything had evidently been made the most of, even to the gate, which, unlike most of the others, had been nicely mended and swung smoothly on its hinges.

Berry turned into the front door, and caught sight of a large, round-shouldered, loose-jointed figure before the hearth.

"Why, Hardy, I didn't s'pose you'd get ahead of me," she said.

The man turned and looked at her, a large, tanned, homely face to suit the figure; broad and coarse, with its heavy jaws, and its dull, brick-colored hair, yet not a bad face, though it gave you at first an impression of dulness, inertness, which the glance in the deep-set eyes fairly contradicted. The heavy jaws too, had a kind of stubborn, bull-dog obstinacy in their habit of shutting together. The soul under that sluggish, heavy mass might be slow in coming to a resolution, but when it was once taken, it would grip fast and long.

The man turned his head and looked at Berry. As soon as she saw his face she knew something had happened.

"Oh, what is the matter, Hardy?" tossing off her hat and showing a heap of bright, auburn hair, as she sprang toward her brother, a quick fear leaping into her eyes.

"They've had a fight over to the Furnace," shooting out the words in a hard, sullen way, as one might, telling a disagreeable truth which there was no hiding, and which the sooner it was out, the better.

"A fight! O Hardy, that is so dreadful!" her face scared.

"Yes, bad enough; a dozen of the hands turned off, — me amongst the number," the last words ground out low and coarse betwixt the set jaws.

"You! O Hardy, you!" the words gasped out under her breath, her lips growing white as she caught the first glimpse of a long, ugly, black bruise across his left temple, half hiding itself under the coarse, thick hair.

Whatever he was to all the rest of the world, the man must have had a soft, warm place in his heart for this little, brown, quaint, small-faced girl, for he answered her look: "Pooh, child! 'taint nothin'; didn't mind it as much as you would the scratch of a pin; don't go to lookin' scared now."

"But, O Hardy, it might have killed you!" drawing close to him and shuddering all over, a sob held down under the words.

"'Most wish they had!" said the man doggedly, the hard, sullen look coming over the face, and making its homeliness fairly repulsive now.

Berry drew close to her brother and laid her small, thin, brown fingers in his huge paw. I think the soft, clinging touch went down to that tender place in the man's heart.

"Don't say that, Hardy. What would become of me?" her lips trembling all through the words.

The man moved uneasily. "Don't see as I'm likely to be of much use to you, now I'm turned off."

They were dreadful words in the girl's ears. "Out of work" meant cold, hunger, misery of every kind to her. It made the warm, bounding, girlish heart sink within her as only that of the miserably poor could sink, and her voice — it seemed a single throb of sharp pain — broke right out with, "O Hardy, how could you fight? It was such a dreadful wicked thing!"

The man winced under the words. Yet he was either thoroughly hardened or mostly innocent, his face changed so little.

I think an unbiassed listener would have slowly inclined to the latter opinion, as the workman's story came out, little by little.

In justice to the man, he related substantially the truth. It was evident that he had a desire to stand clean in the girl's thought; and that desire, though in the long run it might be the one strand which would hold him back from a plunge into desperate evil, made him mollify his own share in the miserable quarrel; and his account would have differed materially from that which some of the officers of the furnace-works had given of the whole scene, with no intent of unfairness on their part.

But, in justice to Hardy Shumway, he meant to tell the truth. Those clear, honest eyes on his face must, it seemed to him, scare away a lie from his lips.

The facts simply amounted to this: Some of the men had taken a drink during the noon interval and, returned to their work in the afternoon a good deal fuddled and pugnacious. Somebody set the spark going. Whether it was a sneer at creed or politics I have forgotten, but the bad blood was roused, and fierce disputes and ugly names ended, as they usually do, in tumult and blows.

The foremen, in the enjoyment of that petty authority which is so aggravating in small natures, exerted themselves to calm the riot in just the way most likely to inflame it. It spread like wild-fire on every side, until there was a general melée, those who did not bring the weight of fists to the quarrel exasperating it by their tongues.

A part of the men kept steadily at work, among which was Hardy Shumway; but the excitement demoralized the whole force at last, much as a panic does an army, and there was more or less fierce talking and loud swearing.

The young man's blood getting hot, when one of his comrades shouted to him from the midst of the fight, he felt it his duty to toss away his shovel and spring gallantly to the rescue.

A great, rough-hewn, massive fellow, his brain fired by his noon dram, had clutched the shoulder of his opponent, — a man of far less powerful physique, — and was pommelling him, perhaps, a little harder than the other deserved, who, in his turn, was too fuddled to bring what force he had of brain or muscle to his own rescue.

Hardy's slow blood was fired with what, in a better cause, would have been a generous courage for his friend, and the sledge-hammer fists of the young workman did speedy execution on the larger of the combatants.

In the mean time, the officers, finding the quarrel had grown out of their control, went for the proprietors, and, of course, gave their own version of the whole affair. The owners, astonished and exasperated, came upon the scene, and their presence succeeded in quelling the tumult.

Then justice was dealt out, in what, I suppose, is the usual court-martial fashion. Some examples must be made. The proprietors honestly desired to punish the guiltiest parties, but a careful investigation would only have revealed the impossibility of doing this fairly.

But Hardy Shumway's flushed face and active fists had been conspicuous in the fray at the moment when the masters came upon the scene, and he was accordingly among the two dozen men who were singled out, paid, and, without being allowed any opportunity for defence, summarily dismissed from the mills.

Berry Shumway drank in every word of her brother's story, and when he was through he stood to her a grand hero. Had he not sprung generously to the aid of the friend who, unable to defend himself, had shouted to her brother? and was it Hardy's fault, if, for his own brave, tender heart, that could not stand still and see another harmed, he had been classed and punished with the crowd of rioters?

For, whatever this man might be in the eyes of the world, — and by most people he was rated merely as a rather coarse-grained, good-natured, slow fellow, — he was something very different in the bright eyes of Berry Shumway.

To them, the heavy, slow figure and the dull face were never homely. She knew the better side of the man, — the heart that cared for and watched over her tenderly; that denied itself often to bring her from the store a fresh melon, or a sweet orange, or a little package of candy; that never let her get up on winter mornings to make the fires; and that always saw the wood was brought and the water was drawn, because, to use her brother's words, "Such little spindles as Berry's arms wasn't made for tuggin' weights."

She knew, too, what pleasant smiles the light-blue eyes held when they opened on her wide, and how the man liked to sit still and listen to her foolish little stories about what went on at the mill and among the neighbors, and how, whenever it was not too cold, Hardy always went out of doors to smoke his pipe of coarse tobacco, because the smell sickened her. But Berry, with her native bright wits, never suspected half she was to her brother; how the memory of that little brown face was his good angel by day and by night; how it kept his feet from the grogshop when the strong, coarse appetites of the man and the voices of his companions urged him there; how the thought of that little, childish figure, sitting at the window of the small, unpainted cabin, darning his stockings or mending his overcoat, kept something sweet and fresh and wholesome in the man's heart, — kept foul thoughts from his brain, and coarse, low jokes, such as he too frequently heard, from his lips.

The tears ran all over Berry's quivering face when her brother had finished his story. Her heart was stirred to its depths with pity for him, — with indignation, too, at the injustice which he had suffered: —

"It was so kind, so noble of you, Hardy; it was just like you; and it's a burning shame — it is" — a sob choked her here.

This was quite as high praise as Hardy deserved, for it was a question whether, after he had entered into the fray and his blood been thoroughly roused, he had not dealt a few blows on his own account.

But perhaps Hardy was not just aware of this, and it was some consolation to stand as a hero in anybody's eyes.

"I could bear it all, Berry, if I knew what was to become of us."

That was the terrible question to be looked in the face by both man and child, now the one source of supplies was cut off.

It brought the old worry into Berry's face, and drove the color from her scarlet lips. But she had a brave heart still. It did not go down into tears and lamentations now, as older ones might.

"Never mind, Hardy; you know there's my money every week; it will carry us along a spell, until something better turns up."

A loud, short, bitter laugh answered her. Then Hardy Shumway seized his sister's hand almost fiercely, pulled up the sleeve, and placed the little, slender brown thing by the side of his own big, brawny muscles.

"Look at these!" he said. "That looks mighty like takin' care of such a great strappin' fellow as I am, don't it? It's a strong reed for a stout man to lean on for his daily bread and his roof at night! Don't talk to me like that, child;" and he threw the arm away with a kind of fierceness, partly anger, partly tenderness.

"You'll get somethin' to do — I know you will. Don't give up, Hardy," still holding to her office of comforter, and thinking herself that three dollars a week, which was all her factory wages amounted to, would have to be drawn out very thin in order to support two people.

"Where's it to come from?" the flash of fierceness going down in sullen moodiness. "If it was spring or harvestin', I might hire out among some of the farmers for a while, but it's jist the worst time o' year, — winter comin' on, and nobody wants hands now."

That was the truth, — the bare, unadorned, bitter truth. Berry knew it in her soul. Her hope staggered and sank down for a moment; then it brightened up again: —

"Anyway, there's a God, you know, Hardy, and he's good, and I don't believe he'll let any great trouble come to you, just because you tried to do what was right and help somebody else. If you'd gone into the fight, now, on your own account, it would be different. I don't believe things will be as bad as they seem," some warmth and courage shining out of the child's face.

Hardy looked at it. If he could not cling to that child's arm, he could to something in her, stronger and steadier than that.

His face brightened a little from its sullen gloom. "I hope you're in the right, Berry," getting up and taking down his pipe.

Berry went up to her little closet of a room and took off her things with a dreadful ache at her heart, yet it had been so light only an hour ago!

"There was the plaid shawl and the pretty new bonnet, — they must be given up now," crushing down a sigh, and the tears coming into her eyes. She had set her heart on them, poor Berry! and now the money must go for bread to eat and wood to burn.

She thought of what had happened to her coming home that night, and at first concluded she would tell Hardy, but then there was no knowing how he would take it in his present unhappy mood.

After turning it over in her mind a few moments, the girl concluded to wait; but if Berry Shumway could have looked up the future and seen all the wrong and crime and misery that her story would have averted, — if she could only have looked; but all she saw was what everybody sees, the high blank wall of the future rising before her!

CHAPTER II.

A LONG, low stone house, that has a slightly foreign look about it, set down there in some north-eastern corner of New England, the rooms spreading wide upon the ground, and verandas and balconies, just suggesting a Swiss cottage to you.

It is a solitary dwelling, and the hills look down on it from every side, yet the whole effect is wonderfully homelike and pleasant.

There is a deep bay-window on one side of the house, crowded with green plants and rare blossoms; and a bird's cage — a gilded, beautiful prison, but still a prison — hangs among them.

The grounds are full of young shrubs, and the stone wall has an interval of rustic gates. Altogether, the place has an air of newness, but everything is substantial and homelike, as though it had stood there for generations.

Late in the afternoon a woman comes out of the door and walks up and down the broad veranda in the brisk air.

Look at her; she moves rapidly, and yet with a certain elegance of motion which would strike you in a crowd.

She is tall and rather slender, and she has been called a beautiful woman so often that she would hardly be flattered now at hearing her own praise, but would accept it as a matter of course.

Her face — artists have called it a Greek face — has a rare delicacy and purity of outline, and the large eyes are of a dark, dazzling brown; and you would have to know them long to know all their possibilities of softness and splendor.

Much the same thing might be said of the sweetness of the mouth, for this face is not one that, like too many other faces, beautiful at first sight, disappoints and wearies you. Contour and color are not its chief charm. It has expression and variety.

A proud woman: you see that by the bearing of the head, by the whole carriage as she sweeps back and forth. A resolute, high-spirited, sensitive woman; you see that also in every glance and motion, — see it in her absolute rest even.

Whatever this woman's faults may be, weakness and infirmity of purpose are not of them. She is not very young, — far past the dew and budding of mere girlhood, evidently.

She arouses your interest, your curiosity, as you watch her going back and forth with the winds plucking feebly at her dark hair; and you think of grand and beautiful women you have read about, of Shakespeare's Portia, and Winthrop's Ellen, and Thackeray's Ethel.

The lady evidently enjoys the solemn, wild gloom of the landscape. She looks off to the bare hills and her face kindles, and then down the valley to the great smelting furnace, where the red lights are beginning to glow.

Everywhere the trees are bare now, for it is close on winter, and though the season has been unusually mild, a soft, treacherous moistness lingering in the air, yet there have been light falls of snow, and to-night there is the promise of a different sort, for the wind blows in from the distant sea with a raw chill, and overhead the clouds muster in thick black columns, and not so much as a single star looks down on that wild, lonely, solemn scene with the red lights glaring in the Furnace. Some women of weaker nerves would shudder and go inside, where there is so much warmth and grace, luxury even. This woman does not. She likes the solemn power of the scene, the storming of gusts of wind in the bare forest, and their low, menacing howl along the valley. It fairly stings her blood. She gazes up and down that lonely valley crowded in between the hills, and her eyes brighten and darken splendidly out of the fine face.

Marjorie Carruthers came just on the edge of the winter to visit her cousin, Mrs. Eleanor Whitmarsh, whose husband is the head proprietor of the Tuxbury Mills and Iron Works. The two, totally unlike as they were, had been the warmest of friends from their childhood, although circumstances had thrown them much apart of late years. Marjorie, indeed, had never met her cousin's husband until this visit to Tuxbury. She came prepared not to like him. She made up her mind that the marriages of her dearest friends must always disappoint her, and Eleanor's, of course, would not form an exception. In this case, however, the disappointment proved a happy one.

John Whitmarsh was no hero nor ideal man, certainly; but there was a sturdy manliness about him, a frank, hearty good-nature, that attracted the young lady. The two became excellent friends, although Mr. Whitmarsh had before the arrival of Miss Carruthers a secret feeling that he should not fancy her; but this he never hinted even to his wife.

Marjorie Carruthers came to Tuxbury to see her cousin and have a little rest, — a word which she hardly understood except in name, for her whole life had been one of varying excitement and gayety.

She had been indulged, petted, and flattered from her birth in a way that would have spoiled a dozen women, and it had hurt her sufficiently. People said she was haughty, imperious, restless; and they told the truth. She was all that, and a good deal more that was not very lovely.

But there was another side to her, and that was a most tender, sweet, loyal, womanly one. Eleanor Whitmarsh knew it, and so did everybody else who got into Miss Carruthers' heart. There were no mean faults about her. If she was haughty, it was among her equals. Her inferiors in social position always liked her. Those who worked for her invariably bore testimony to her kindness and generosity. She had been an orphan from her earliest remembrance; and brought up by her mother's brother, whom, in some respects, she resembled, though in all her finer traits she was his superior. Marjorie's uncle had been as indulgent as the most idolatrous of parents, for in all the world she was the only thing whom the man really loved; and as for Marjorie, she adored him.

The man had not much faith in his kind; he showed a hard, cynical, sarcastic front to the world. As for religion, he held it mostly as a compound of superstition and hypocrisy, and quoted French Philosophy and German Rationalism at his club. But the memory of Marjorie's mother always checked the sneer on the man's lips when he spoke to that child of what had been her mother's faith. Still it was hardly possible that a brain as swift and keen as the child's should not penetrate to the core of his opinions, no matter how carefully he might attempt to disguise them.

Marjorie's uncle was a scholar, and he had spared no pains to cultivate the girl's mind. Books, the best of masters, the choicest social advantages, had gone to the making up of Marjorie Carruthers' youth.

Her uncle's means, although they were not nearly so large as the world gave him credit for, still enabled him to surround his niece with every grace and luxury; and when the girl grew older, both being fond of travelling, they passed a large part of their time abroad.

Of course, so beautiful and attractive a woman could not fail to have numerous admirers. They might have been trebled had the girl been a coquette; but, though she was fond of admiration, expected it as her right, just as a queen does homage, there was a native honor and honesty in the girl which would not permit her to trifle with the feelings of any human being. Then, she had made up her mind, for her uncle's sake, never to marry. She knew the man thoroughly, — his idiosyncrasies, prejudices, and all she was to him, and what it must cost his proud, exclusive nature to see another man with claims on her time, thought, affections, superior to his own. Marjorie heroically resolved to devote her life to the uncle who had given so much to her.

Marjorie held to her covenant, and in truth, though many men crossed her path, not one tempted her to break it. Sometimes her fancy was touched, her tastes gratified, but the feeling went no farther.

She had passed her twenty-fifth summer when a storm broke suddenly into a life that love and indulgent care had made like one of those radiant June days into whose perfectness the May ripens and dies.

While they were abroad, Marjorie's uncle contracted a fever during a journey through Spain, and died suddenly. He had passed far up into his sixties, but he seemed still in the prime of his manhood.

The possibility of his ever leaving her had hardly crossed Marjorie's mind.

It seemed at first as though the suddenness of the blow would kill the girl; indeed, she wished it would, in that first, stunned, inconsolable grief.

Marjorie did not return to her native land until more than a year after the death of her uncle, dreading the old scenes and associations, which must remind her of him, mourned as few parents are mourned by their children.

Her uncle's will had bequeathed his entire property to his niece, but he had been a careless financier, and his tastes had always been extravagant and made great inroads into his wealth.

Marjorie Carruthers, instead of being left a great heiress, as everybody fancied she would be, had in the end a very moderate fortune; sufficient, it is true, to preserve her independence, but involving a good many sacrifices of the elegant luxury to which she had been accustomed.

Although she was sincerely fond of her cousin, Miss Carruthers did not look forward with any sanguine anticipations to this visit, in such an out-of-the-way corner of the world as Tuxbury, between the sea and the lonely New England hills. Eleanor might write glowing descriptions of her home and the scenery, but Marjorie Carruthers put very little faith in the couleur-de-rose landscapes of a woman who was so deeply in love with her husband that a desert and a cabin in his society would be fairer than a bower in Eden without him.

Marjorie wanted to see her cousin, however, and at last concluded to brave even Tuxbury for that purpose. The visit, intended for a couple of weeks, had already expanded into more than two months, and still the girl remained. The lonely home among the hills had proved the most delightful change and rest to Marjorie Carruthers.

It had brought out the best, softest side of her. Nobody was afraid of her sarcasms now; and, if the truth must be told, they could sting and cut deep and smooth as Beatrice's, upon occasion. She looked off with a kind of shuddering reluctance to that great, gay world, where her beauty, her grace, her many gifts had borne their parts so well.

The sweetness, the quiet, the home peace entered into the girl's soul. She loved the silence of the hills, the strong, wild, solemn scenery, the great Furnace, with its red rows of lights glaring out angrily upon the night. She would sit for an hour at her window before getting into bed, and watch it; and at such times strange voices would seem to come and whisper to her soul, "What have you been doing all your life, Marjorie Carruthers? What are you living for now?" Such meanings seemed to haunt the hills and the valleys, and grow distinct away from the blare of the great world she had left behind.

Marjorie had been a guest at Tuxbury, for a short time, with only Eleanor and her husband and the baby for society, when there was an addition to the family in the shape of the host's younger brother, Benjamin Whitmarsh.

Marjorie was secretly anything but pleased at the prospect of his coming, but she found the young man quite unlike her previous conception of him, whatever that may have been!

He had his faults, this Benjamin Whitmarsh, and you will be likely to find them out before my story is done.

The young man and woman brought together out of the great world, where each had played their part, found plenty of points of mutual interest.

Both had travelled over the same ground, and had, it appeared, a good many tastes in common, for they talked of foreign lands, books and pictures together, until Mrs. Whitmarsh, who had never been abroad and was not a brilliant scholar, declared that between Ben and Marjorie her poor little box of a brain was wholly upset.

The young man had led a somewhat knight-errant life, and it was his elder brother's strong desire that Ben should become a partner in the Tuxbury works. The latter did not take very kindly to the prospect of settling himself down to business, having led not precisely a life of elegant ease, — his temperament was too active and adventurous for that,— but one of absolute liberty.

During this visit, however, it had seemed to his brother that Ben's prejudices against settling down to business were giving way, especially as a partnership in the firm would not involve that sedulous devotion to business which the young man insisted would absorb all the sap of his nature, leaving him richer perhaps by a good many thousands, but poorer in everything else which made life worth living for.

Such a view of this world's goods met with a small share of sympathy from the more practical elder brother.

They had been looking for Ben Whitmarsh all that day. He had gone to New York, and his brother had telegraphed to him to bring up a large sum of money to pay off the hands next day. John seemed a little annoyed at supper that the young man had not arrived, and said it would be slow work for anybody to get Ben to work in business grooves.

Marjorie looked up the road, and saw how dark it was growing, and gathered her shawl around her with a little shiver.

What a lonely ride Ben Whitmarsh would have from the adjoining town, six miles off, to the mills! There was not a single dwelling on the road, and if it should be known that the young man had gold about him! There were desperate men among the hands: she recalled now something she had heard when she first came to Tuxbury about a fight they had had among the workmen at the Furnace.

What if some of those very men should attack young Whitmarsh in one of the lonely places on the road! What chance would there be for the solitary traveller, afar from the sound of human voices?

Marjorie Carruthers was no coward, but she shuddered now, and put the thought away, straining her eyes up the road for the sight of a figure on horseback, and wishing young Whitmarsh would come, feeling a little uneasy about his absence, and walking faster than ever to get rid of the feeling.

At last she turned to go into the house, for it was quite dark now, and the wide gloom and the bellowing of winds began at last to affect her unpleasantly.

Just as the girl reached the door, it seemed to her that she caught the sound of voices far up the road. She turned and walked to the end of the veranda, and, straining her eyes out into the dark, saw several figures of men, like gliding phantoms, in the distance.

As they came nearer she perceived they were carrying a heavy load, and at last a red streak of light from the Furnace shot across the whole party. She saw the load was a human figure, with some heavy black drapery thrown across it.

Marjorie Carruthers' heart stood still. She waited there in the night, on the veranda, paralyzed with a cold terror, her face ghastly white.

The crowd drew nearer, figures coming out of the Furnace buildings and gathering excitedly about it.

At last the crowd reached the great side gate, carrying their burden with a slow care that was frightful to see.

Then Marjorie rushed out from the veranda and shouted, "What is the matter? What are you carrying there?" and, holding up their torches, the startled men saw the white face of the woman standing out there in the dark like a spectre.

Then some voice, grave and full of pity, answered, "Go into the house, ma'am; this isn't a place for you."

It was one of the foremen who spoke, and he came forward and took her arm and attempted to lead her away; and when she looked in his face and saw the shock in it, she stammered, with lips that seemed to grow stiff, "Will they bring it in here?"

"Yes; this is the place for him," the foreman answered; and then she knew who that covered burden was, which the men were bringing so carefully into the house at Tuxbury.

CHAPTER III.

A DREADFUL sickness went over Marjorie Carruthers; her hands caught and dragged desperately at the foreman's arm, or she would have dropped on the ground; the pain for a moment was like a knife striking deep and deadly into her heart.

Then, with one gasp, the strong energies of her will rallied, — forced her into swift, dominant action. Whatever they might say, she would not believe that limp, heavy mass was Benjamin Whitmarsh, her thought cowering back affrighted before that one terrible monosyllable which faced it.

The men had not paused for any ceremonies at the front door. They had burst right into the hall, and stood there a moment with their burden, in doubt which room to enter.

With one glance Marjorie Carruthers took it all in; she was nervous and irritable among the commonplaces of life, difficult to please, the victim of fancies and whims, which made those who judged her superficially — and few people judge of their kind any other way — suppose that she would go down under any pressure of adverse fate; that her place was like the butterfly's in the summer and the clover-fields of life.

With that glance, Marjorie's thought, like a single flash of lightning that bares the wide landscape, took in the whole position of affairs.

She saw Eleanor Whitmarsh just as Marjorie had seen her cousin when the girl looked in a moment on the bedroom before going out on her solitary walk. The whole picture stood before her now. The young mother with her babe in her arms, having a very riot of fun with him, for the boy was in such a high glee that night that he could not go to sleep.

How pretty the two looked! The grouping had struck Marjorie at the time, for her naturally keen insight of form and color had been quickened by whole days of luxurious dreaming among the master-pieces of the Old World.

She saw now the small, sweet face all alive and flushed with its frolic — the little dimples of fingers clutching awkwardly after the mother's pretty hair. She saw Eleanor look up, who, on perceiving the shawled figure at the door, had over some jest about the "Robed sybil and her nightly invocation to the stars," with other pretty nonsense of that sort.

Mrs. Whitmarsh was ready for any amount of freaks and oddities in her cousin, and ready to indulge them, too, to any extent.

Marjorie had always been the most unaccountable, as well as the most fascinating, of mortals, in the eyes of Eleanor Whitmarsh; and that night the girl had gone across the room and kissed the mother and her baby before she went out to her solitary walk. It was a rare demonstration with her.

Perhaps Marjorie had unconsciously carried the color and warmth of that little home scene as a kind of background to all her thoughts that evening. At any rate, it came up before her at this terrible juncture, distinct and vivid as when she closed the door on it.

Eleanor was a fragile creature at best. If they should break in upon her of a sudden with that horrible sight, it might kill her.

In a moment Miss Carruthers stood among the men. I think the white, set face had something just then of the power which Joan of Arc must have worn when she led the charge on that old battle-ground of Compeigne.

"Stop one moment;" the words clear and low, but the instinct of authority in each syllable, in the solitary gesture of her hand; and then she turned toward the room where she had left Mrs. Whitmarsh.

At the door Marjorie met her cousin, who had heard the tramp of feet in the hall. In the sudden silence that followed she came forward, perplexed and frightened.

"O Marjorie, what is the matter?" she stammered.

"Go back, Eleanor, go back," pushing her into the room, and shutting the door before the lady could glance out into the hall.

Then Marjorie stood still, and the white faces of the women looked at each other. "Eleanor, a terrible thing has happened, and there is no time to soften the news; can you bear it?"

Mrs. Whitmarsh staggered, and everything swam before her. Then she sprang to her cousin's side with a horror in her wide eyes that even at that moment appalled the girl. "Is it my husband?" she whispered.

"No, Eleanor." Seeing the flash of relief on the other's face, she added, quickly, "But it is his brother, and they must bring him in here."

Marjorie had kept her hand fast on the door-handle during the few seconds in which this talk had been going on; then she opened the door and made a sign for the men to enter, and they came in and Mrs. Whitmarsh saw —

One would have said, knowing the two women in ordinary life, that the young matron would have faced any terrible conjunction of circumstances with more nerve than her cousin. But the former succumbed at that sight now, cowered, and wrung her hands helplessly. It was Marjorie who pointed the men to the bedroom that opened out of the library, where the two women stood, though her lips grew stiff when she tried to speak.

"Oh, is Ben dead — is Ben dead?" shrieked his sister-in-law.

Marjorie turned her blazing eyes upon her cousin: "No, I tell you, no! Don't mind what they say. He is not dead!" the words tearing themselves fiercely out of her dry throat, and then she walked straight into the bedroom, not sparing her eyes from the worst.

They had lain the man on the bed now and removed the covering from his face, and the snowy linen was already mottled with blood. It was a sickening spectacle. Everything grew dark before the poor girl's eyes for a moment, and she caught at the nearest chair. Then she compelled herself to look at the face on the pillow. She saw the long, cruel bruise slanting down from the forehead to the temple. Benjamin Whitmarsh was not a man to die without a struggle.

She saw the rigid face, and the shadow upon it seemed the shadow which falls sooner or later upon all faces.

They had torn away the coat too; there was the long, ragged wound which the ball had made, tearing in just above the clavicle, so frightfully close to the jugular vein, and the blood was oozing out in a slow, red stream: it had been for hours.

The men stood around, a dumb, horrified group, for one moment. Then one of them spoke: —

"He was a dead man afore we found him. That bullet did the work — poor fellow!" and the ashen face and the lifeless hands dropping down confirmed the fearful words.

But they only stung Marjorie Carruthers into a hot defiance. It was strange how that awful moment, that had unstrung those hard, coarse men, nerved the heart and steeled the brain of the delicate woman. She turned fiercely upon the man.

"Who knows he is dead?" she cried. "What right have you to say that before a surgeon has?" Then catching sight of a flask of brandy which stood on the mantle, she caught it up and tried to pour part of its contents through the man's lips, which were slightly apart. After that it was wonderful how this girl, whose extremely sensitive organization had always been a matter of anxiety to her friends, took the lead and gave her orders, the coarse group of men following them without a question.

She, who had always sickened at the sight of blood, sopped it away from the wound under the neck with her own hands, and then actually closed the seam with her fingers, through which occasionally a red jet made her turn faint to her heart's core; but still her fingers kept their place firmly, holding back, she told herself, the last spark of life in the body of Benjamin Whitmarsh.

Yet not one of that group of men had so much as a doubt that the set face would ever move again. But no one ventured to call in question Marjorie's orders, and she gave them in brief whispers. She despatched one for a surgeon, another for hot water; and every few moments, at a sign from the girl, they poured spirits between the white lips of the man, not daring to tell her again how hopeless it was — that the poor fellow was dead as the stones on which they had found him.

There he lay with his thick, long hair tangled about his face, — his face which was sculptured in some fineness and grace it had never seemed to own in life, — and Marjorie Carruthers bent down over him, her own as ashen white, and some fierceness in it which awed the others as they turned from the dead man to the living woman.

Some desperate power outside of herself seemed to enter into the soul of this girl. She would have the life of this man — drag it back from the cold clutch which Death had already made on it.

Long afterward, Marjorie questioned solemnly with her own soul whether once during that awful time she had called upon God, even so much as thought of him, and she could not tell.

Her whole being was in revolt at Death. He was the Force with which she fought that battle, moment by moment, — no pulse in the wrists, no faint quiver of life in the muscles of the white, still face below her.

It was wonderful — it seemed hardly less than a miracle — how clear and prompt that girl's brain was through all that time; how she ordered just the right restoratives; did just the best things possible to keep the life, if so be it lingered, in one fluttering, imperceptible pulse of the breast of Benjamin Whitmarsh; her fingers closing with a desperate tightness upon his wound, the wide, dry, bright splendors of her eyes gazing up all the time in the face of that gaunt, mocking Death, they saw coming to claim its own, — the life that she would not yield up to him.

In a few moments Mrs. Whitmarsh came in and ranged herself by her cousin's side; but, though she made the effort, the little woman was too thoroughly overwhelmed at this crisis to be of much service.

She had little doubt in her own mind that Ben was what the men told her, — found murdered by the roadside, that night, less than three miles from Tuxbury.

The baby, waked by the strange noises, commenced crying lustily, but his mother never once went to soothe him. She could only think of her husband, and that it was Ben who lay there, and stand by her cousin and shiver.

Meanwhile, a great crowd had gathered about the house; but Miss Carruthers had given orders that nobody should be admitted until Mr. Whitmarsh or the surgeon returned. Everybody obeyed her, and this order was enforced like all the others, but curious, horrified faces blocked every window, if she had cared to look up and see them.

The time seemed ages before either host or surgeon arrived, although it was less than three-quarters of an hour that Marjorie held her watch for life or death at the bedside.

Mr. Whitmarsh had ridden out some miles to a new forge, which was in process of building, and the tidings did not reach him until he was on his way back.

The surgeon, too, was just returning from a remote professional visit, and the news of the murder found him on his way home; so the brother and the doctor met at the front door together, the crowd having made a wide opening for them to pass through.

"O John!" At the sight of her husband's face at the door, Mrs. Whitmarsh's shriek made Marjorie turn her head quickly. She never forgot the look in the man's eyes as they met hers, — the shock and agony; for, next to his wife and child, that younger brother of his had been the dearest thing on earth to the heart of John Whitmarsh.

Then, just behind him came the old surgeon, with his gray head and his deep, alert eyes, taking in everything at a glance. Fortunately he was a man of skill and experience.

As Marjorie caught sight of this man her strength gave out. She had held Death at bay before the others, and at least kept them from asserting their convictions. But here was one whose decision would be final. All the hard, fierce defiance with which she had held her ground with her invisible Enemy broke up now. The white, stiffened lips grew mobile again. "O doctor, they say he is dead; but I've tried to save him, — I've tried!" she cried, her fingers, stained with life-blood, still closing fast upon the wound.

"You've done the right thing, my child," answered the old surgeon, coming forward and taking the wrist which he, too, had small doubt was a dead man's as he caught sight of the ashen face on the pillow; while John Whitmarsh, who had always prided himself on his iron nerves, completely broke down at the dreadful spectacle of his murdered brother.

There was a dead silence as the doctor fingered the pulse, and then put his ear down to the chest and felt about the region of the heart, making a sign to Marjorie not to remove her fingers.

At last he lifted his head. Everybody's breath seemed to come thick and hard before the man spoke.

"I perceive some faint signs of life here still," he said. "There is a bare possibility we may save him."

A low, half-suppressed cry of surprise and joy ran about the room, and then the doctor took Marjorie's fingers from the wound; a single red jet of blood followed, but he stanched that quickly, asking swift, brief questions about what had been done and how long the man had lain there; and in a few moments, Marjorie, out of whose white lips there had come no cry, saw, with the others, a little tremor cross the man's face.

She cried out sharply then, and staggered against the doctor. He looked up in her face. "Take that girl away from here," he said sharply.

"I did the best I could, — the best I could," she kept moaning to herself, as though she did not see the people around her.

"If the man lives, he will owe his life to you," said the surgeon; and yet he only said what everybody there knew before.

But hearing those words, and waving John Whitmarsh off when he would have helped her, Miss Carruthers staggered out of the room and up to her own chamber.

As I said, all through that dreadful crisis that had just passed, Marjorie Carruthers had not once called on God, perhaps not once thought of him, only of that Death she was facing and holding off from his prey; but now she sank down on her knees, and the cry that choked through her sobs was, "O my God, I thank thee!"

It was long after midnight before the crowd dispersed, full of the cool barbarity of a deed that fairly stunned every soul on first learning it, perpetrated right in their midst, for young Whitmarsh must have been struck down less than three miles from the mills.

Some half-dozen workmen had been detained late that night at the Furnace, owing to a break in the machinery. They were on their way home to the settlement, and had just crossed the bridge beyond the woods, where the road led past Piebald Rock, when one of their number suddenly stumbled over a black heap in his path, and on recovering himself he discerned a human figure under his feet.

A shout brought the man's companions to his side, with a small force of lanterns which had carried their owners safely past the gullies and hollows in the woods.

The men recognized their master's younger brother as soon as they turned up his face to the light, for of late he had been frequently about the mills; and the blood and the scarred face told its own story of foul play to the scared group that shuddered about him.

It took the men some time to recover from the terrible shock sufficiently to deliberate what had best be done with the murdered man; but they concluded at last to carry him home to his brother.

A horse-blanket, which one of the company happened to have with him, was thrown over the body, and in this way they had returned with their awful freight to Tuxbury.

The young man must have lain at least two hours in the roadside after he had been left there for dead.

There could be no doubt the object of his murderers was robbery, as their victim's pockets were rifled of all their contents; but the result must have keenly disappointed the expectations of the villains.

Meanwhile, under the ceaseless care of the old surgeon, who knew that the man's life hung upon a thread, heat and circulation were slowly returning to Benjamin Whitmarsh, but it was quite dawn before the young man opened his eyes and gazed upon the faces about him, with the sudden flash of joy through all their pallor. Too exhausted with loss of blood for motion or speech, he probably had not the faintest idea of what had transpired to him.

But some trouble came into his eyes as they turned languidly from his brother's and sister's face to the surgeon's, and the latter motioned Mr. Whitmarsh to speak. It was hard work for the elder brother to get out the words which choked thick in his throat, for the eyes that looked up at him were eyes that, it almost seemed, opened out of the grave.

"Ben, you know me?"

A slight motion of the lips made intelligent answer.

"That's enough, dear boy!" using unconsciously the old home-words of their childhood. "You are very sick; you've met with a serious accident, and you're not to speak or think about it now. You're at home, and we're going to pull you through, provided you'll be submissive and behave yourself; above all, keep absolutely quiet."

If, in his exhausted state, Benjamin Whitmarsh did not take in all the words, he did their meaning sufficiently for his brother's purpose. He was too weak still, to feel much curiosity about his present position, or to be more than half conscious of it.

He went off into a half swoon, half slumber, starting a little at intervals with the pain in his wound, which the surgeon did not dare to probe for the bullet while his patient was in his present exhausted condition.

Dr. Avery was a short, thick-set, heavy, bluff sort of man, with a good deal of marked individuality. Everybody knew that under some tart flavor of speech and certain angularities of original constitution there was a sound, mellow heart, that brought its own light and warmth into sick-rooms, and put hope and spirit into his patient when both were failing him. His powders might be good, more than one patient averred, but the very sound of his voice and the sight of his face were worth a pile of them.

Such a man might have made his mark in the world, but Tuxbury was his native home, and locality exercised a dominant power over him. Perhaps it was a weakness. He sometimes thought so as the years gathered upon him, but it was too late to break the withes now.

"You think he'll live, doctor?" said John Whitmarsh, taking the surgeon into the library, where the cold early morning looked in wearily at the window. Sky and earth seemed palsied now with the burden of the dying year upon them.

"I think he will, the Lord willing!" his deep-set, gray eyes twinkling while he rubbed his hands briskly. "But in my experience of fifty years it's about the heaviest sea over which I ever tided a human life."

"And you saved him, Dr. Avery!" exclaimed Mrs. Whitmarsh, who had come in and clasped her hands on her husband's shoulder; and her face looked so pale and pitiful, so unlike the pretty, blooming thing that had presided at the table whenever the doctor had dined at the Whitmarsh cottage, that it touched the old man.

"No, I didn't save him. That girl upstairs did it. I tell you there wasn't a moment to spare when she took hold of him. Two or three more, his blood going at that rate, and he'd been a dead man, without so much as one gasp or groan. Did just the right thing, too, — stopped the blood and poured down restoratives, and kept the life from flickering out of him. You women are strange creatures!" turning to Mrs. Whitmarsh. "Nerves, hysterics, freaks, and all of a sudden you'll come out with some grand heroism, like your cousin last night. If that brother of yours ever stands on his feet again, Whitmarsh, he'll owe it to that girl's courage and promptness in just the nick of time."

"Dear Marjorie! I shall love her better than ever!" sobbed Mrs. Whitmarsh.

"We shall be her debtors for life," answered her husband.

He was not a man of many words when he felt deepest, but his wife and the doctor knew those came from his inmost heart.

It was a stunned, bewildered household into which Dr. Avery had entered the night before. Marjorie Carruthers seemed to concentrate in her white face and blazing eyes all the decision and capacity of thought or execution which the others had lost. It was not strange that the suddenness and horror of the shock had unnerved everybody. But Dr. Avery was a man for emergencies, and above all things, to use his own quaint words, he believed in putting pluck into man or woman. A few of the old man's calm, steady words always rallied one's energies like a trumpet.

It was wonderful now how a few sentences from him calmed and strengthened the mistress of the house; and even her husband, who, now that the imminent peril was over, was fast regaining that mastery of himself which had been so cruelly shaken the night before, felt the subtle magnetism of the doctor's presence, as he never would have done in a less strained and susceptible mood.

The first measure to be taken was to discover the perpetrators of the foul crime that was already making the whole country-side shudder with horror, and John Whitmarsh was not a man to leave any stone unturned there.

"I foresee a day's work before you, Whitmarsh, but I shan't allow you to leave the house until you've eaten a good breakfast of beefsteak and coffee, and made that little pale wife of yours promise to do the same," said Dr. Avery, coming over and placing his hand on the lady's shoulder.

"O doctor, I never can eat a mouthful again!" she cried, with a gesture of dismay.

"Yes, you will, my dear madam. Come now, it's either a hearty breakfast, or a bed and cordials and opiates for the next two days. I give you your choice this moment, and you know in my own realm I'm worse than an Eastern despot."

A little smile actually came about the lady's white lips. "I think I'll take the breakfast, doctor," she answered.

"That's my wise little Eleanor," said her husband, taking the doctor's cue, and Mrs. Whitmarsh really started off to give orders for the meal with some show of animation.

"One moment, if you please," said the doctor, detaining her. "How is Miss Carruthers?"

"The women got her to bed, doctor, more dead than alive. I've been upstairs once or twice since you ordered the sleeping-draught, but she only stared at me in a way that was frightful, and never spoke. She's asleep at last."

"That is well. I foresaw the reaction would be terrible on a temperament like hers. I must see her as soon as she wakes. Royal woman that, when a grand emergency brings out her forces."

The doctor went back to his patient, and the servants, who had huddled together during the night, whispering to each other with shocked faces, got into their old grooves, and the usual, blessed every-day life and order soothed and braced once more the household at the Mills of Tuxbury.

CHAPTER IV.

BERRY looked up as her brother shoved open the door and came in. She had cowered down close to the scanty fire and laid her face in her arms — her face, in which was a sort of wild horror that quite quenched the worried look which had grown habitual during the last week, sharpening the outline, and dulling the expression.

But there was no lack of life in the face now, as the girl burst out, "O Hardy, have you heard — do you know?"

"Heard what?" tramping heavily into the room, and shaking off a few snow-flakes that clung to his coat.

"Why, the dreadful murder night before last on the Mill Road. It was Mr. Whitmarsh's brother!"

"Murder!" the word coming out slowly and heavily from his throat. "Nobody was killed!"

"But it was just the same, Hardy. It took all my strength away when I heard it, and I've been tremblin' ever since they were telling it over down there at the grocery. Oh, it was awful!" and she shivered, sitting there, with her shawl and hood trailing on the floor, just where she had dropped them.

"No business to scare a girl in that way," exclaimed Hardy, in a short, crusty tone; but Berry did not mind that. She had been used to short, sullen answers during all these dreadful weeks that Hardy had been out of work.

"Then you don't know — you haven't heard how Mr. Whitmarsh's brother was taken up for dead on the Mill Road close by Piebald Rock? He was on horseback, on his way to Tuxbury, going at a canter, because it was late, when, all of a sudden, two men sprang right out from the woods and tried to stop his horse. He was a-goin' to push ahead, and — and — oh, there's so much to tell, and I haven't got it all quite clear; but he was brave, and wouldn't stand still and be robbed without a struggle, though they told him they didn't want his life, only his money. There was a dreadful scuffle before they dragged him off his horse, and one of the wretches dealt him a blow on the head that fairly stunned him. They thought that had fixed him, and were at his pockets in a moment, but he made another spring, and had almost throttled one of the men when he held up his pistol and fired, or it went off, and they left the poor gentleman lyin' there bleedin' to death in the road. It was ever so long before some of the mill-hands came along and stumbled over him in the dark without knowin'.

"They picked him up and carried him home, s'posin' all the time he was dead; and he was, just the same, though it seems there was some lady a-visitin' at the house who wouldn't believe he was quite gone, and she just stopped the bleeding with her own hands, and held the wound tight, and made them keep pourin' things down his throat, when all the rest was so distracted they didn't know what they was about till the doctor came, and he says it was that that saved his life. Oh, I wish I could see that lady! I would just crawl a hundred miles to thank her on my knees for savin' that poor, dear, noble gentleman's life!"

Berry had had all the talk to this animated peroration, to herself; the little tongue, shy and dumb as she usually was among strangers, could go with a rapid energy when any feeling had once fairly started it.

Hardy Shumway had listened, his back partly turned away, as he stood by the table fumbling in the drawer for a knife to cut the cord which tied a small package he had taken from his pocket.

He looked up now in some surprise at his sister. "The story isn't news to me. I heard it all down town," he said, the quiet brevity of his speech in strange contrast with his sister's excited tone.

"But wasn't it awful, Hardy? Such a horrible thing right in our midst! I hope they'll find those cruel murderers. I could hang them myself!" the brown, peaked face flashing out in sudden fierceness.

"It was a bad thing, no doubt of that," working at the cord with his clumsy fingers, which seemed to bungle strangely this morning. "But you take it to heart, Berry, as though young Whitmarsh was a friend of yours."

"I can't help it when I think how good and generous he was. Nobody else in the world would have done so much, and then how he spoke and smiled; and to think it all happened in that very place, too, and of his lying there in the dark all bruised and bleeding!" She broke right down into sobbing at that picture. Poor little Berry Shumway! It was a soft heart under the peaked face.

Her brother had turned around sharply now, and pushed back his cap like a man who felt a sudden need of air. His lips were half apart, and his breath seemed to come out of them hot and dry. He moistened them once or twice before he spoke: —

"What do you mean, Berry? what do you mean?"

It flashed across the girl then that she had never told her brother what had transpired to her on the road home that afternoon that he was turned out of the Tuxbury Mills.

She had meant to, a dozen times perhaps, but Hardy had been in such hard, sullen moods during the last miserable weeks that she had been a little afraid how he would take the story, and put off the relation to a happier time.

But Berry was too much excited now for any fear; moreover, she wanted to awaken in her brother some keener sympathy for young Whitmarsh. His stolidity over the whole atrocity grated on her feelings.

So in a few sentences the whole thing came out, — the sentences broken, ungrammatical, slipping off into incoherency sometimes, but the whole strong and picturesque, for all that.

One could see the lonely road-side and the little girl sitting down there under the shadow of the rock counting her money, and the horse standing in the road, and the handsome gentleman leaning softly over with the twinkle in his eyes, placing the bank-note atop the small heap.

Berry's memory, too, had garnered up every word that was spoken at that time. She went over it now rapidly, pausing a moment sometimes to swallow down the tears as the whole scene rose vividly before her.

Hardy Shumway had taken in every word, the heavy face still as marble, and growing stark and rigid while his sister talked.

He strode toward her now and caught hold of her shoulder: "Why didn't you tell me this before,—why didn't you tell me?" he fairly shouted.

His grip hurt the girl cruelly; his look terrified her. "I was afraid of you," trying to wrench her shoulder away. "O Hardy, don't,—don't!" so frightened she did not know what she said.

But the pallor of his face hardly seemed like rage, after all, for the next moment the man's heavy frame dropped limp as an infant's in the chair. He stared at Berry with some shocked, hunted look in his eyes; and at last he said, speaking huskily, with no anger, but a kind of slow despair in his voice, "If you had only told me before, Berry,—if you only had!"

"I would, Hardy, if I had thought you would care so much. I thought you were angry with me, you had such an awful look," her face trembling all over. "I was so frightened, Hardy, when you took hold of me, and you are so white now."

"I didn't mean to hurt you, child. Never mind how

I look; I felt sick of a sudden, but it's gone now. If you will bring me a drink of water?"

Berry had it there in a moment, and she noticed how her brother's hand shook as he took the tumbler and drained it at a gulp, like a man parched in sandy deserts.

"You aint angry with me one bit, Hardy?" hanging around him doubtfully.

"No, child; you haven't done anything wrong, only if you'd told me all about that before — but you didn't know —" He stopped there.

"What difference does it make, Hardy? We couldn't have prevented anything that happened to him, you know?"

After a moment's silence, Hardy Shumway said, "I thought your wages had held out wonderful of late. I s'pose that five dollars of his'n have helped carry us along."

"Oh, yes!" her very own smile coming out on the red, unsteady lips. "It's got you a good many papers of tobacco, and the side-joints we've had lately, and the chicken for Christmas-dinner. He said he was a venerable Santa Claus, you remember. I've often thought we never should have got on without that money. Five dollars goes a great ways sometimes."

Hardy put his elbow on his knee and rested his chin on his palm; a little low, choked groan came out of his mouth.

Berry did not understand it, but, with her native instinct for the bright side of things, she broke out in a moment: "But, O Hardy, it is so much better than if he had died there! To think that young lady saved his life!"

"Yes, I'm glad of that — I tell you I am!" with a blaze of fierce joy in his light eyes. "I could do what you said, Berry, — go down on my knees to that woman and thank her for savin' his life; even I could do that." He stopped there and broke out into a loud, hard laugh that somehow clashed in Berry's ear like a shriek of agony.

"Why, Hardy, what is the matter with you?" with a sudden doubt lest the long trouble of these days had driven her brother mad.

"Nothing, child; don't mind me. I haven't been quite myself since I overheard what you said, Berry."

"What did you overhear, Hardy?"

"You didn't mean I should, but I had come out into the back room for a light, though you didn't know it, and as you went upstairs to bed I heard you mutter to yourself, 'I'm so hungry I can't go to sleep. If there was only one good slice of bread in this house! but the last mouthful and the last cent's gone!'"

"O Hardy, did you hear that?" her face coloring all over.

"Yes, I did, Berry," growing strangely excited for one of his slow, heavy temperament. "It seemed as though it would drive me mad. To think of my little sister's goin' to bed and lyin' awake hungry, and I, a great, strong, lusty fellow, without so much as a crust or a bone to give her. I see then how you'd been off many a mornin' to work, after stintin' your breakfast, so I wouldn't go without, while I'd got nothing to do but laze at home all day. I couldn't stand that, Berry. It seemed to turn me into a savage. I never had a wink's sleep with those words o' yours ringin' through my brain, and they made me feel as though I was ripe for anything. What right had men and women to nice homes, and food to waste, and fire to warm 'em, while you was a-lying' upstairs, after working all day, without so much as a crust to stop your hunger?" The big, dull face fired up now, his eyes blazing fiercely.

"O Hardy, I'm so sorry you heard that. I happened to be talking to myself; but don't you know how the grocer trusted us the next mornin', so we had a nice breakfast?"

"Yes, but who has got to pay for it in the end? You don't know, Berry, how it takes the heart out of a strong fellow, and turns him into a brute or a savage, when he stays at home livin' on the wages of such a little, slender mite as you are. I never thought it would come to this!" his fierceness going down in a kind of dull apathy of despair.

"But it won't last much longer; I'm sure it won't. You will get some work pretty soon, Hardy."

The man shook his head: "You've said that so many weeks, Berry."

"But I don't give it up yet. I know it's real hard to believe there's a God anywhere who cares anything for us when one is hungry and hasn't a thing to eat," the tears going thick over her face; "and sometimes, when it's been dreadful dark, I've a'most given him up. But it hasn't been for long, and I do believe he knows, and that he will find a way out of this for us. Yes, Hardy, I do."

He looked at the wet, flushed face. These last weeks had pinched and sharpened it, — the only face in the wide world that the young English workman loved. There was something pathetic in that look, that might have touched a very callous heart.

"Well, Berry, don't talk about God," he said. "If there's any good in trusting him, you may."

It was no time for preaching sermons now. Berry saw that as clearly as far wiser souls. Hardy Shumway's soul had been turning a long way from God in these days.

The darkest time of their lives had gone over him and Berry during this winter. Far and near the man had sought for work, but, outside of the factories, business was dull, and there was a plethora of hands everywhere. He might have gone off to some distant city, seeking for employment, but he had neither money nor friends, and then there was Berry to leave behind!

The girl had kept up a stout heart, a brave face, though she could not help its growing a meagre one, through it all. Her wages had been strained to their utmost capacity, and they had kept scanty fire on the hearth and food on the board through all this winter. But here and there little debts accumulated, and it was hard for a man without work to get trusted for coals or bread.

So Hardy Shumway had sulked with his pipe by the fire, or tramped the country over in a vain search for employment. It was just that time of the year when nobody wanted hands, and every day the young man's words grew fewer and his face harder, and at the door the gaunt face of the watching wolf grew leaner and fiercer — leaner and fiercer!

"O Hardy, what have you got here?" exclaimed Berry, her eyes fairly glittering as she caught sight of the pile of fresh, tempting buns which had half fallen out of the paper her brother had laid on the table, when he first came in.

"I brought them for you. Help yourself, Berry."

She caught the cakes greedily in her hands. Nothing so fresh and dainty had passed her lips for weeks.

"How nice they do taste! But where did you get the money, Hardy?"

"Don't ask me. You'll never have to pay it," in that tone of his which always effectually shut off any farther questioning on her side.

She concluded, however, that Hardy had borrowed the money somewhere, and the cakes tasted so good she could not be sorry.

So she went on eating and praising the buns, while her brother watched her. Suddenly she stopped eating.

"Why, Hardy, aint you goin' to eat some?"

"No," with a quick wave of his hand; "I don't feel hungry, and if I did, I shouldn't want such sweet stuff. I got 'em for you, Berry."

"What a good fellow you are, Hardy!"

"Good! good!" he repeated to himself, a dark smile coming out on his lips. But Berry did not see it.

In a few moments she went to talking of the "murder" again.

"Oh, I do hope they'll find those wretches, don't you, Hardy?"

Hardy Shumway coughed a little, rose up and went out into the next room without speaking one word.

Berry noticed that he did not answer, and supposed that he had not heard her.

CHAPTER V.

NINE days had passed since the night of the tragedy near the Mills of Tuxbury, and the matter still remained the talk, the wonder, and the unsolved mystery of the country for miles around.

During this time no stone had been left unturned which it was thought might afford a clue to the discovery of the perpetrators of the crime; but this, thus far, had baffled the skill of the keenest detectives, both of New York and Boston.

There was not a single physiognomy among the Gaelic, Celtic, and Saxon varieties, which make up the sum total of the operatives in mills and factories, that had not undergone a keen but covert scrutiny from the eyes of veterans skilled in the art of reading human faces and human characters down to a certain level.

Careless expressions had been treasured up and turned over, much as an old miner turns over specimens of new soils to see if there be a hint of gold-dust among his handfuls of river-bed and hill-side dirt, and tosses them away at last with a growl of contempt over the worthless mud or sand.

But the detectives never growled over their failures. They were too thoroughly seasoned for any indulgence of that sort of human weakness. They still, however, like well-trained hounds, kept quietly and briskly on the scent.

Meanwhile, heavy rewards were offered far and near to stimulate the cupidity of certain classes of men, or the treachery of accomplices; but, despite all these efforts, the deed which had proved so nearly the midnight assassination of Benjamin Whitmarsh remained still shrouded in the impenetrable mystery of the beginning.

Meanwhile the victim was slowly rallying from the Death into which he had been well-nigh swept down. Vital forces less powerful could never have renewed themselves after the dreadful exhaustion they had undergone; but there was a robust tenacity in the constitution of young Whitmarsh which just carried him through the deadly strain.

The man was fortunate, too, in having just the sort of physician that he did in Dr. Avery. For several days the life of young Whitmarsh hung upon a thread, and the least mistake might have been fatal. When friends at a distance learned his danger, there was a great deal of talk about having a consultation of the best medical advisers from the city, and the elder brother at once took Dr. Avery aside and conferred with him on the subject.

The old man was quite ready to resign his patient into other hands; but he had his own theories, and he would not have others intermeddle with them.

"I cannot promise to pull your brother through," he said to the elder Whitmarsh, in his prompt, blunt fashion; "and these other men, with their wider reputation and knowledge, may do for him what I cannot. I cheerfully resign the charge; but this is one of those critical cases of life or death in which I must have my own way, absolutely. Working with others, deferring to their opinions, I would not take the responsibility on my hands. Left to myself, I will do the best I can, and there is a chance for him; but I may fail."

John Whitmarsh had a profound respect for the old doctor's sagacity, and this speech did not weaken his faith. He simply grasped the man's hand and said, "Dr. Avery, I leave the boy in your hands, and no human being shall intermeddle with you." And both were men of their word.

So slowly, that the improvement, to those who watched him by day and by night, was hardly perceptible, the young man's life rallied again. The lapses into unconsciousness, which startled his friends with a terrible fear that Death was swooping back again after his half-relinquished prey, grew less frequent. Benjamin Whitmarsh began to converse with those about him in snatches, — to have over his jokes with a certain quaint flavor of wit and humor in them, which was native to him as the air he breathed; and when they brought his little nephew to him, and the boy crowed at sight of the familiar face, the man actually forgot all about his wound, and would have caught the baby in his arms if they had not checked him.

For the first week young Whitmarsh had manifested little curiosity concerning his situation. One day, however, waking out of something that was half a swoon and half a slumber, he did ask suddenly of his brother, who was bending over him, "John, what under heavens brought me down here?"

The man was taken wholly unprepared by this question, but he managed to say, quite as a matter of course, "You had a terrible fall coming over from town the other night."

The young man's eyes clouded with perplexity: "That was not all, John. You are holding part of the truth back. Let me have the whole," in the old, impatient, dominant tone, which rang down into his brother's heart like the sweet clamor of bells borne on a wind that came far across the seas from the coasts of their boyhood.

"What do you remember, Ben? If you can go over the story without harming yourself, I shall be glad to hear it, only you must not forget that you have been a desperately sick man."

"Desperately sick!" going over with the words thoughtfully, — "that means sick almost unto death, I suppose?"

"It means just that, old fellow; but the worst is over; we intend to pull you through this squall and set you on dry land again."

He was silent after that for a while, and John saw that thought, feeling, memory, were all busily at work with his brother. He did not venture to interrupt them. He sat still, wishing that Dr. Avery would come in at that crisis. It was the first time the physician had left his patient for three hours since that dreadful night.

At last, Ben Whitmarsh looked up; the cloud cleared from his eyes, and the old, clear intelligence shone out of them.

"I remember it all, John. It was done in a few moments. The villains came very near finishing me up. They took me by surprise, you see."

Whether for good or for evil, it would have to come out now. John Whitmarsh saw that; moreover, he was eager himself to learn whether he could glean any new facts from Ben's coherent relation of the affair. During his illness the latter had gone over the whole encounter many times; but it was always in a half-conscious state, and ended in child's babble about some event of his boyhood, bringing up with such freshness and quaintness some old, homely, long-forgotten scene, that it more than once drove his elder brother from the room.

All that Ben Whitmarsh would ever have to tell of the midnight onslaught, which had so nearly cost him his life, he told at this time. There were no new facts elicited. It was substantially the same story which the young man had so often gone over in his semi-lucid intervals, — the same story which had been repeated by groups in the stores and on the highways, and by thousands of firesides among the hills for miles around, during the last week, — the same story which, away off in the factory settlement, Berry Shumway had told one morning to her brother.

It brought the heat into the young man's cheeks and a blaze into his eyes, weak as he was, living over the brutal attack once more; and several times he had to pause from sheer exhaustion, and his brother, alarmed at the other's agitation, would interpose with, "There, Ben, old fellow, that's enough for this time. Let the rest wait. You'll harm yourself if you keep on."

But Benjamin Whitmarsh had been accustomed to having his own way, and illness does not always promote obedience. The story, with all its strong, fierce, brutal life, its deadly peril, was fortunately not a long one.

Its effect on John Whitmarsh was very much what might have been expected, coming from those white lips, with the shadow of death hardly yet fallen from the sick face beneath him.

The brothers had grasped each other's hands all the time they talked. There was a singularly strong, yet not demonstrative, affection between the two men.

"If I could get my hands on the villains! If I could only get hold of them!" the man broke out, losing all thought for the moment of the danger of agitating his brother, "they should swing for it."

"Have you any clue to them yet?" asked Benjamin, faintly.

"No, dear fellow. What a brute I am to excite you so! Not another word before Dr. Avery comes. Ah, Ben, we'll bring you sound and strong, with colors all flying, into port yet."

A faint smile touched the sick man's lips; but utter exhaustion compelled obedience this time, and before

Eleanor came in to take her husband's place at the bedside, — he being suddenly summoned away, — the invalid had sunk into a heavy slumber.

A couple of hours later, the man woke up greatly refreshed, and found the blooming, smiling face of his pretty sister-in law before him.

There was the old sparkle in his smile this time: "Ah, Nellie, what heaps of trouble I'm making you!"

"Not a bit, you darling old fellow!" choking over the words, her face quivering into smiles and tears. "O Ben, to think we're going to have you well, after all!"

"It was a fine chance to let me slide off for a nuisance, and be rid of me forever. You must have cared something for me to take all this pains to pull me back on my feet again."

This talk was hardly like Benjamin Whitmarsh; but when a man is struck down in the pride of his youth and strength, and comes up again out of the very shadow of the grave, he feels what human love is worth.

"Stop talking in that way, Ben," with a gush of tears over all the warm brightness of her face. "It hurts me. As though we shouldn't all have died if you hadn't got well. O Ben, you don't know!" stopping right there with a desperate effort.

"Forgive me, Eleanor; I would not hurt you for the world. You are the dearest little sister a man ever had, and you know we are not like you women; but it's pleasant for a fellow to feel, when he comes up from where I have, that somebody's glad to welcome him back." More than once Mrs. Whitmarsh saw his lips quiver across the words.

"If you could only have seen us that night you would have found out —" and here again Mrs. Whitmarsh suddenly checked herself, wondering at her own imprudence; but the truth was, the lady's nerves had been so shaken during these days that she was not just herself.

Her brother-in-law did not reply at once, and the lady resumed her seat; and he held her hand and smiled in her face once in a while, and she smoothed his hair and his pillow, trying to keep very quiet and ease her overcharged heart by little offices of that sort.

At last he spoke suddenly: "Tell me, Eleanor, all about that night."

"Oh, no," with a little pantomime of dismay; "you are not strong enough to hear it yet. The doctor and John would never forgive me."

"Never mind the doctor and John," with a little gesture of his old imperativeness; for, in the first place he had been the spoiled, youngest darling of the household; and though Benjamin Whitmarsh had an original stock of indolent good-nature, he was accustomed to having people do what pleased him. "You won't treat me now as though I were a baby, Eleanor. It will do me no harm to hear some of the facts. Tell me at least how long I had lain there."

"At least two hours, they thought."

"And some of the workmen stumbled over me in the road, I think John said?"

There could be no harm of course in telling the sick man what he knew already, Mrs. Whitmarsh reasoned, and so by degrees he drew one fact and another from her, the lady really fancying she was communicating very little that was new to her brother-in-law.

"It was Miss Marjorie, then, you say, who first caught sight of me as the men brought me up the road? I can conceive it must have been an awful shock to her."

"Oh, dreadful, Ben!"

"Miss Carruthers' nerves could stand nothing of that sort. Poor girl! She dropped in a dead faint, I suppose."

"No, indeed, she did nothing of that sort," broke out Mrs. Whitmarsh, most energetically. "O Ben, if you could only have seen her that night — if you knew what you owed to her!"

This was treading on dangerous ground in the invalid's present weak state. The lady recollected herself again.

"Now, Ben, don't ask me another word, for really I must not tell you; and oh, here comes Dr. Avery, and what will he say to me?"

"That depends upon what you have been saying to our patient, Mrs. Whitmarsh," answered the doctor's voice, with a certain juicy mellowness of years and of a warm heart flavoring all the words.

At the first glance the favorable change in the sick man was apparent to his physician.

There was no sight on the earth that thrilled the old man's soul with so keen and reverent a joy as the sight of a face which he had long watched with tender, doubtful anxiety, rousing itself once more from out that ashen pallor and stillness which is so close to the shadow of death, and now the man's innate joy and gratitude broke out: "The Lord be praised, my son! We'll have you sound and stalwart on your feet again!"

"And you have saved his life, doctor, — you and Marjorie!" broke out Mrs. Whitmarsh afresh, in the midst of her gladness.

A little, warning glance from the physician came too late, and a touch of the pulse told its own story.

He shook his head. "You've been having some exciting talk here," he said.

"It was all my fault; I dragged it out of her against her will, doctor," answered the sick man; "and what's more, I must have the rest."

"What have you been telling him, Mrs. Whitmarsh?"

"Nothing, only what he knew before. At least, that was all I intended."

"It was about what happened to me that night, doctor. Give her your permission to tell me the whole story. I want to know what you all did with my old hulk when you got it into port once more."

Dr. Avery saw that his patient was excited, and he knew the monomanias of the first stages of convalescence. It was evident that Mrs. Whitmarsh had betrayed enough of the events of that terrible night to awaken a hankering curiosity in her brother-in-law, and though she had her full share of feminine tact, this was a matter in which the lady's feelings were too profoundly enlisted to hope now for any successful dissimulation. She would intend to obey the physician's orders religiously, but Ben Whitmarsh would drag the main facts out of her at an expense of nervous vitality which he could ill afford.

If the truth must come out, it had better be told squarely, leaving nothing for the patient's curiosity to tease and hanker after for days. It was best, too, that the story should be told in his presence. Dr. Avery made a virtue of necessity.

"I always employ the same rule with sick men and babies," said the cheery voice. "Both have their crotchets, — one for playthings, the other for tragedies. Let our friend have his, Mrs. Whitmarsh."

This playful preface was not without a purpose. The doctor knew the hold which the thing the invalid was to hear could not fail to have even on a well man's heart and imagination.

Mrs. Whitmarsh had lived over the dreadful life of that time too vitally not to tell her story well.

She went over it now from the beginning. Nobody interrupted her from commencement to conclusion.

The sick man, with his lips slightly apart and his hand shading his eyes, drank in every word.

They could see the muscles about his mouth quiver sometimes as Mrs. Whitmarsh kept on, carried quite out of herself by the memory of that awful hour when the man lay as one dead among the crowd of living men around him, and Marjorie Carruthers stood there with her white, stark face and her burning eyes, waving back Death from his victim.

All the heroism of that night's work was set before the eyes of the sick man as no other voice in the world could have done it; for though Marjorie Carruthers had many admirers, there was nobody who loved her with just the fondness of her cousin, Eleanor Whitmarsh.

The poor thing had broken down into sobs a good many times while she was relating her story, but she got through with it at last.

Then her brother-in-law drew his hand from his face. It was trembling all over, and out of it shone all the hoarded power of his eyes. "Doctor," in a hoarse, broken whisper, "was it she — Miss Carruthers — who saved my life?"

"It was she, my friend. That half hour would have finished you up for this world, if her heart or brain had failed her. We don't know what heroic stuff is in these women until we come to test them. Miss Carruthers ought to have been on the staff of Florence Nightingale."

The invalid made no reply. He covered his hands again with his eyes, and they saw the tears gush through his fingers. Dr. Avery signed for Mrs. Whitmarsh to leave the room.

CHAPTER VI.

MARJORIE CARRUTHERS came downstairs the following day, for the first time. She had been confined to her room with a sort of slow fever; nothing dangerous certainly, but a most natural reaction from the strain she had undergone.

Dr. Avery had largely allowed Nature to recuperate herself in the girl's case, and one day he quite appalled Mrs. Whitmarsh, who had hung all this time with a kind of tearful fondness and anxiety about her cousin, by insisting that Miss Carruthers should accompany him on a five-mile drive to one of his patients.

For once the lady demurred at the doctor's orders: "She is so sensitive and nervous. She has never been herself since that terrible time. Poor Marjorie never can bear that drive, doctor."

"Nonsense!" snapping his fingers. "I'll answer for 'Poor Marjorie's nerves.' She needs something to wake her out of herself, and your perpetual coddling and cosseting will never do that. I shall be back here in half an hour, my dear madam. See to it by that time that Miss Carruthers, thoroughly bundled up in furs and shawls, stands by my gig. I'll hold myself responsible for the rest."

There was nothing to do but obey, and Mrs. Whitmarsh went upstairs in dismay to communicate the doctor's orders.

To her surprise, the young woman received them with great animation. Marjorie always had been a restless creature, her cousin reflected, putting a week's work or pleasure in a single day, when the notion seized her, and the idea of a ride suited her mood. She protested herself ennuied to death betwixt her books and Eleanor's fussing, and that a ride in the crisp, frosty air was the one thing that would give her a new lease of life at this juncture; and she was actually at the window when the doctor returned, and within the next two minutes he had the young lady snugly bestowed in the gig, and Mrs. Whitmarsh, standing on the veranda, watched the two drive off, and seeing Marjorie's parting bow and smile, so much like her old self, the lady murmured as she turned to go in, "The doctor was right, I believe, after all."

Nobody could doubt that, seeing the face of Miss Carruthers after the first half-hour was over. Such a fine glow and animation had come into the listless pallor which had held her cheeks for the last ten days. She laughed at the doctor's speeches. There was a witty crispness in them which hinted of her uncle's talk; and though the latter had been a fine scholar and a fastidious critic, which latter Dr. Avery could never be now, still the old man had a faith in God and in humanity which gave to his character a real force, and to his life a use and blessing which the other had never possessed.

Dr. Avery, with his shrewd insight of character, saw deeply into this girl, — her faults and weaknesses, her rare truth and nobleness.

He never flattered her, not even for that deed which had made her the heroine of the country-side, and drew folks to stare at her with eyes full of curious wonder and awe as they drove along.

Once, after they had passed a little group of factory-people on the roadside, who had stood still and gaped at her, Marjorie drew her veil, with a little gesture of impatience, over her face. "I wish people would let me alone," she burst out. "I never had any ambition to be stared at as though I were a gorgon, giraffe, or something of that sort, strayed out of a menagerie."

"Softly, child, softly," went the doctor's bright, steady tones. "It is not at all worth fretting one's soul over."

"But this vulgar notoriety is so offensive to me. I never could endure to be gazed at, — to be the central attraction of a gaping crowd of coarse people, like those we have just passed. If good-breeding were only a native instinct with all mankind, and womankind also, how much annoyance one would be saved!"

Was this fretful, impatient creature the woman who a few days ago had risen up to the height of a grand heroism, fronting death with her calm, resolute face? What a compound of virtues and weakness, of taint of blood and sickness of soul, of meanness and grandeur, this human nature was! Look at this woman now, sitting by his side, with her foolish whims and freaks, and think of what she had done once!

So the doctor's thoughts went to himself as they dashed along over the thin rind of snow, through the clear, sharp, up-hill, wintry air. Then he spoke, his words seeking after the nobler key that was in the nature of this proud, strong, weak woman, — the key that, rightly touched, would be sure to yield its own music.

"When you have trebled your years, Miss Carruthers, as I have, almost, you will learn that one must take all the consequences of their deeds, and that these are not always pleasant, even when the deed is a good one, — as good as yours the other night."

A little, swift change came in the girl's face. She drew nearer to her companion's side and dropped the veil from her face. "Was it really a good deed, do you think, doctor?" her voice now like a child's who asks timidly whether it has done right. This sudden surprise of mood, this swift, childlike side of her, was one of the subtle charms of Marjorie Carruthers.

"I took it for granted you must know I thought that," answered the doctor.

"No, I did not, because you have never praised me as the others have done. I hate flattery, but it is pleasant to hear you say I did a good thing that night, because I know that you mean all that you say."

"It was so good a deed, my child, that I praised God for putting it into your heart to do it, and so forgot to praise you."

A touched, tender smile came into her eyes now:

"You think it really was good then! It did not seem as though it was myself at all, during the whole time."

"But I do think, Miss Carruthers, you would do it all over again if it came to you, though you were certain the natural consequences would follow," — an arch twinkle in his eye, — "the staring and gaping of a curious, vulgar crowd."

A little, conscious smile about her lips, but behind it was the flash of the old dauntless look with which she had confronted him that night; yet she said, very quietly, "I believe you are right, doctor. If it came to me, I would try to go through the whole thing again."

"I think, too," he continued, "that amongst that coarse, underbred crowd, there are a good many warm, honest hearts, who have lately been praying blessings on your head, Miss Carruthers."

The fine, clear, delicate face was touched with a great softness: "I used sometimes to wish, when I read of Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale and Grace Darling, that I might do at least one brave, generous act before I died. If that was one, however, I was wholly unconscious of it at the time. I saved that man's life, as you say I did, simply because I could not help it. I never thought of what I was doing."

"I do not doubt it, my dear child. Yet that does not make it less a good thing; a great one as the world goes, — that you did."

"A great thing to save a human life! I suppose it was, and perhaps it is for this very reason that I lived, when it seemed to me I had nothing to do in the world, — when I think I would honestly have been thankful to anybody who would have taken my own life swiftly away from me."

He knew that she was speaking of the time when her uncle died. Marjorie was usually reticent about the storm that had gone down among the very roots of her youth and torn them up and hurled all their wide greenness to the winds.

"Was it so bad as that, my poor child?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, just so bad," the brown radiance of her eyes glittering through their tears.

So much Marjorie Carruthers had never said before, either to man or woman.

At this moment the factory road, along which the two had come, struck off suddenly to the right, winding between the pastures, with low, brooding hills closing in the landscape on either side, — a landscape out of which all the year's life and grace and beauty had emptied itself. Even the thin snows gave a general look of dreariness to everything, and the winds rasped angrily through the air.

Marjorie shivered a little under her furs and wrappings at the first outlook on this dreary landscape.

"Never mind," said the doctor. "If the air is bitter, it's bracing, like a good many other things in life."

Before his companion could reply, she caught sight of a little, quaint figure in the road, in a gray water-proof.

A thin, brown, startled face under a straw hat looked up at the two occupants of the gig. Everybody within miles of Tuxbury knew that short, stout figure and the broad shoulders inside; but as the girl in the road caught sight of the fair, dainty face of the doctor's companion, a change came into her eyes, — a look so full of eager pleasure, amazement, awe, that one could not help being struck by it.

Marjorie Carruthers had carelessly tossed her veil on one side of her bonnet, and some freak of wind caught it now, and, whirling it across the road, struck it down on a heap of barberry-bushes on one side.

The girl in the road sprang forward at that sight, caught the veil where the wind had lodged it, while the doctor drew up his horse, preparing to alight.

The girl came forward now, her eager, awe-struck eyes still on the lady, the brown, peaked face flushed with some feeling that brought out a secret of force and character in what would have been otherwise only a homely little factory girl's face.

She held up the veil in her brown, bare fingers. "Here is your veil, ma'am," she said.

Marjorie Carruthers leaned forward. "Thank you," she answered. "You are very kind to save me any further trouble for my carelessness."

Any lady would have said as much under the circumstances, but there was a graciousness in Marjorie Carruthers' smile and manner, which gave to her words a royal bounty and sweetness which the girl had never met before.

She looked up in the high-bred, delicate face, a sudden longing coming into her eyes, and, underneath, the red, bright mouth trembling with shyness and with shy words that would never unaided find courage to steady themselves on such unsteady lips.

Marjorie saw it all. "Is there anything you would like to say to me? Do not be afraid," she continued, her smile at times cold and proud as the glitter of ice, now striking along every word, — a very marvel of sweetness.

"I!" stammered the girl, the blushes working up into her face until her cheeks fairly rivalled the native scarlet of her lips. "O ma'am, I said I would go a great many miles to thank you once for saving that young man's life the other night. I knew as soon as I saw your face it was you who did it; and — and he was once very kind to me," the sobs working up into her throat and choking her eyes with tears. "If it isn't proper, I hope you'll forgive me, and just let me say this once right out of my heart, I thank you."

Marjorie Carruthers leaned forward. This child's native burst of feeling shook the girl to the centre, as all the wonder and praise which had been heaped on her for the last week had failed to do.

She took Berry's red fingers in her soft, ungloved palm: "My child, there is nothing to forgive. It is I who ought to thank you."

Dr. Avery had been watching all this intently. He had noticed the little figure in its gray water-proof going home from the factory more than once; but there was nothing striking in that sight, and he had never seen clearly the warm, honest little face that, despite its peakedness and ridge of freckles, had a character and interest of its own, when it was wide awake, as it was this moment.

There was no time for talk now, but the man put out his hand and grasped the little brown fingers.

"Shake hands with me, also, my little friend," said the voice, through whose heartiness rung at times the eternal youth of the old man's soul. "Tell me what I shall call you when we meet next time."

"Berry Shumway is my name, Dr. Avery."

"Ah, I see you're ahead of me, and so I shall not have the honor of introducing myself. Well, get home out of this cold as briskly as possible, and good-by," his keen physician's eyes taking notice of the thin face and small figure. "Low blood, general want of tone and good-keeping," he thought to himself.

Then the gig rolled on. Neither of its occupants spoke for a while. Away, among the distant gullies and clefts of the hills, the winds struggled and moaned in vague complaint, like the restlessness of human hearts, and cold, gray clouds hurried across the sky as though they had lost their way and sought it in vain.

The doctor waited for Marjorie to speak. The healthy warmth and tenderness of her nature, under the crust of whims and pride, had come to the surface at the little factory-girl's voice.

"Did you see how she looked at me?" she said at last, following out in words the line of her own thoughts, "what a mingling of awe and devotion there was in her eyes! I have seen just such in the faces of women who came to bring their offerings to the shrine of the Madonna in the chapels of the Old World. But to make a saint of me! Poor child! poor child!"

"I have not come across a more genuine outbreak of feeling in a long while. There's something in that girl; I must keep sight of her."

"I hope you will, doctor. How blue and cold her little fingers were! It troubled me."

"She's one of the factory-spinners. They have hard times through the winters. Poverty is a bitter thing, Miss Carruthers."

"Yes, I suppose it is," politely assenting to his remark. The young lady had an impression, however, that poverty was associated with vulgarity and vice. She had heard her uncle discourse on that subject very eloquently many times, and naturally absorbed his views.

She was, however, generous to the core, and, whatever her theories might be, Miss Carruthers' conduct was quite inconsistent with these, when her feelings were enlisted. She went on again: —

"Mr. Whitmarsh, it appears, has done her some great favor, or she fancies it. I'm curious to know what it could have been."

"He is a thoughtless, generous fellow, and the child has not been so much in the habit of receiving favors of any sort that she would be likely to forget one; but a nature has to be originally fine to feel gratitude so deeply."

With that remark they drew up to the low, old-fashioned farm-house which was the limit of their drive. Dr. Avery was only gone a few moments, while Miss Carruthers remained outside.

On their return home, he brought out, for the young lady's amusement, some of those odd, comical stories which the doctor told with such effect in sick-rooms. They put the young lady in high spirits all the way home. This was precisely what he wanted. He had a purpose in asking Miss Carruthers out on this drive. It developed itself as soon as he got her safely into the house, where Mrs. Whitmarsh came forward, utterly amazed at the change and brightness in her cousin's face.

"What have you been doing to her, doctor? Have you led her to some secret fountain of health and youth, since you went away?"

"Nothing of the sort; but you yielded to one of my prescriptions, against your better judgment. Now I'm going to startle you with a fresh order. Miss Carruthers, I want you this moment to go right in with me and congratulate Mr. Whitmarsh on his improvement."

Marjorie started nervously: "O doctor, don't; I cannot do it. Wait until he is stronger. I have been dreading this meeting all along."

Mrs. Whitmarsh looked thoroughly aghast at this proposition. "They are neither of them fit for it, doctor!" she broke out afresh. "Think of their last meeting, and what a strain this one must be."

"Not another word," said the doctor, the grim look on his face that it was useless to attempt to oppose. "I know what I'm about. The sooner a disagreeable thing is over the better. Don't stop to remove hat or shawl, but come straight in here with me this moment, Miss Carruthers."

And Marjorie went, and Mrs. Whitmarsh, fluttered and terrified, followed after.

Benjamin Whitmarsh, lying on the bed in the shaded room, his head turned a little on one side, had no intimation of the lady's presence, until he heard the doctor's voice in its quiet, matter-of-course key: "I have brought our friend in here to see you after her ride, Mr. Whitmarsh."

The man turned then and saw her standing at his bedside, — the woman who had saved his life.

There she stood in her riding-dress and hat, in her proud, delicate beauty, her face a good deal agitated, but the light and color in her cheeks and eyes, which the long ride had brought there.

Benjamin Whitmarsh had been looking forward to this time, and wondering whether all words would not fail him, falling mean and small beneath the level of his feeling, and now it had come when least he expected it.

Marjorie did not speak. The swell of that memory when last she stood by the bedside, looking down on the face so like a dead man's, on that very bed, came in on her soul like the rush of incoming sea-tides.

Benjamin Whitmarsh spoke first, his words under their great burden of feeling creeping out slowly on the silence: —

"I owe you my life, — my life, Miss Carruthers.

What shall a man give in exchange for that?" He had taken her hand while he spoke, and Mrs. Whitmarsh was crying softly behind the doctor.

"Do not speak of it." Marjorie's voice shook out breathlessly. "You would have done the same for me."

"I cannot tell. There were strong, stalwart men all around me, and not one but left me to die. It was you that dragged me back from the clutch of death; you, delicate, nervous, shrinking woman, to whom I owe this very breath, for which I thank you."

"I could not believe you were dead; I would not when they all said so," answered Marjorie, a flash of the old fire through her tears.

Benjamin Whitmarsh lifted the long, slender, beautiful fingers in the light and gazed at them. "It was these," he said half to himself, "that stanched the blood, and held the wound until help came! How did they do it?"

"They did it because God helped them," answered Dr. Avery now, thinking that it was time for him to interfere and break the stress of an interview that he had foreseen must bear with awful vividness on all their feelings. "Miss Carruthers did her own part nobly and well, but when I heard all, I said, 'Give God the glory.'"

They were the best words. While Marjorie had been standing by the bedside, beholding this man whose life had been given her, a feeling of her own small share in the work of that night, of humility and helplessness, had come over the girl. "Yes," she said, solemnly, "it was not I; I think it was God who helped me."

As for a real, living, personal God, Ben Whitmarsh had left that long ago among the dreams and faiths of his boyhood. Do not mistake the man here. With all his tumblings around the world, his life had been singularly pure. Indolent, æsthetic, pleasure-seeking, looking upon all human life as a sort of vast comedy, with his robust strength and his happy organization, Benjamin Whitmarsh had a sound self-respect and a native scorn of whatsoever was mean, ignoble, and vicious, which had kept his life sweet and wholesome.

He had read Spinoza and his disciples, and the young man's opinions had been shaped, more or less, in the world of German pantheism and French philosophy.

Who, he reasoned, had any means of assuring himself that a personal Power created the world and administered its laws? The ordinary human mind had always needed some creed on which to anchor itself, and the system of Christianity was no doubt the finest and noblest which had ever been devised, — far better than the mythologies of Greece or Rome, or the graceful superstitions and legends of the mediæval ages, although each system, no doubt, had its elements of truth.

So, in the pride and strength of his youth and manhood, Benjamin Whitmarsh had disposed of his creed; but, in that hour of his human weakness and need, the soul of the young man turned, as long ago it had turned in his childhood, to something warmer, truer, better, than German pantheism or French philosophy.

Was there a real, tender heart of God somewhere, who had cared for him in his utmost strait, and given this girl her courage and strength to rescue him? Was the world God's after all; and had that God some work for him — Benjamin Whitmarsh — to do, that his life had been given back to him from the gates of death?

Nobody knew in those few silent moments what was in the man's swift thoughts, but he would not forget them through all the life to come.

Dr. Avery felt now that it was high time to give the interview a more natural, commonplace tone; a few words that "clinched," to use his own quaint phrase, were worth a dozen sermons. He came forward now, saying, "Miss Carruthers, you had better take a chair after your long drive, and we'll have a quiet family chat to ourselves;" and he actually pushed a seat to the side of the bed, and Marjorie sat down; and they had, after the strain and excitement, one of the pleasantest, most natural half hours in the world. The doctor avoided all agitating topics, and told some stories with his own crisp flavor of fun, which set them all to laughing, and then one and another took part in the talk, as though nothing had happened since they last sat and joked together under the family roof.

"Your cousin is the most unaccountable young woman, Mr. Whitmarsh," said the doctor. "She was fired with indignation because people on the road were determined to make a heroine of her. I think they really envied my poor old mare, and I was alarmed lest their enthusiasm should take the form of supplanting her in the work of dragging us over the snow."

Marjorie's laugh had its old, silvery ring, all the fresh sweetness of the girl's best side sparkling through it: "It was thoroughly absurd of them to make a heroine of me, but I think it was equally so for me to be angry with the silly geese. When I was a child they used to tell me my pride was as quick and touchy as that of some Spanish hidalgo. I haven't improved much yet, I fear."

"Yes you have, my dear. I remember what you were then!" broke in Mrs. Whitmarsh.

Everybody laughed at this ambiguous compliment. "Poor Eleanor! what a hard time of it I led you!" said Marjorie; and then her cousin's husband came in, and his look of amazed bewilderment was comical.

"What have you been doing to these people, doctor?"

His wife answered: "He's had Marjorie off on a ten-mile drive, John; and as for Ben, — but he shall speak for himself."

"I feel as though I should be on my feet in a week. The doctor's a necromancer;" but while the invalid said this with a flash of his old spirit, he was still too feeble to be so much as bolstered up in the bed on which he lay.

Then the doctor spoke: "I consider your brother out of danger now. It has been a hard struggle, but with his fine constitution he will make leaps henceforward."

Everybody's joy was too great for a word, until Mrs.

Whitmarsh broke out: "I must do something, John. Can't we have all the bells rung and a day of general jubilee proclaimed throughout Tuxbury?"

"Wait until I get well enough Eleanor, to lead the dance with Miss Carruthers," said her brother-in law.

So, where Death had been lying in wait so lately, these people wreathed with green tendrils of talk and jest the black, yawning gulfs of their memory. It was best so.

"I was right, you see," said Dr. Avery in an aside to Mrs. Whitmarsh when he had left the sick-room, taking the others with him. "I foresaw the first meeting between them must try both, but you see how smoothly we've carried them over the breakers."

"Yes, I see. From this time I will not set up an opinion in antagonism to yours. I'm converted thoroughly, doctor. But it's only because you're a magician and carry an invisible wand and wear enchanted armor."

"Ah, my dear madam, a little pluck and a little sound sense are the magicians which will slay so many of the lions in our paths!"

He glanced at Marjorie Carruthers. She stood by the mantel, her face roused into its native animation as she chatted with her cousin's husband. It was all as he would have it there, and as for the invalid in the other room, he was asleep by this time, and his wound would need no care until to-morrow.

So, without another word, the doctor sprang into his gig and drove off, and in the midst of his thoughts there rose before him, with some wistful pathos in it, the brown, peaked face and the scarlet lips of the little girl he had met on the road to Tuxbury.

"Berry Shumway," murmured the man to himself. "I must tuck away that name in some corner of my memory, and make use of it the very first chance I can get."

CHAPTER VII.

It was nothing unusual for Dr. Avery to have a summons to the workmen's settlement just outside the limits of Tuxbury. His long professional experience in a wide country district had given him a habit of "killing two birds with one stone." So, as he was on the point of turning his horse's head homeward, the old physician suddenly checked himself with a vague sense of something yet left undone. He stroked his thick gray beard doubtfully a moment, then shouted out to the workman who stood in the doorway watching his departure, "Do you know a family by the name of Shumway living about here?"

"There's only two of 'em, — a brother and sister, — half-a-dozen houses this side of the end of the next street."

Less than three minutes after this reply a loud knock brought Berry Shumway to the front door. She had just returned from her day's work, and set promptly about kindling a fire, and her eyes were half-blinded with smoke when they first met the doctor's, "Good-evening, my little girl; you are just the small person I am in search of;" and he gave her his hand. "Will you let me come in a moment?"

"Oh, yes, sir, if you please," making way for him in a kind of blank amazement that was amusing.

"Did you think anybody was sick here, doctor?" she asked, timidly, as she placed him a chair near the fire.

"Oh, no; but doctors sometimes like to make visits outside of a sick-room; one enjoys getting hold of a sound apple after poking about for a long while among gnarled and specked ones."

Berry laughed at that, bustling about, a good deal excited and fluttered at this unexpected visit; a little uncertain and worried, too, as to the meaning of it.

The doctor took in the whole room with a rapid glance or two. It was humble even to poverty, and gave you a general feeling that everything had been strained to the uttermost, — that there was nothing to spare in larder or coal-bin. Yet wherever little Berry Shumway's red fingers put themselves there were order and cleanliness; an attempt at harmony and grace, too, cropping out here and there in the blue mugs on the mantel and the little red vase on the cotton cover of the table.

"There, never mind putting things to rights any further. I came on purpose to see you, Berry, and I can only stay a short time."

"Yes, sir;" and she came and sat down by him, with her pinched, sallow face wide awake and flushed all over, and looked at the glittering gray beard, and the bright, pleasant eyes a little uneasily.

Dr. Avery understood that sort of look from the poor and worried. He was used to dealing with it, and he went on talking in a way most likely to set the girl at her ease, about the weather and the factories and the town, and how, as he had been close by on a visit to a sick boy, and remembered the little girl he had met in the road the other day, he thought he would just drop in upon her.

"Oh, I'm so glad you did!" the pinched face coming out into a great glow of wondering pleasure. "But I didn't s'pose you'd ever remember me again, you have so many people to think about."

"They haven't put you out of my mind, at all events, you see, Berry. I think the lady who was with me will not forget you either."

The worry and bashfulness quite thawed out of her face now: "O sir, if I had stopped to think, I could never have said what I did; but the words came and I could not help it."

"They did no harm, my child. On the contrary, they did honor to your heart for taking so warm an interest in the life of one who was almost a stranger to you."

"But he was not that. — at least not exactly; he did not seem so," faltered Berry.

"You have seen young Whitmarsh, then? I should have fancied he was quite unknown to you if you had not let that remark fall the other day."

"I had never seen him but once; at least not to speak to him; but I shall never forget that time," her mouth quivering.

There was a breath of silence. Berry looked up into the kindly, honest face opposite her. She was a child still in most things, and her glance went straight to the something warm and wise and true in the old man's face. "Would you really like to hear about it, doctor?" she asked.

"I really should very much, if you feel like telling me."

So it all came out in her simple, touching way, with quick pauses and hurryings of breath that gave their own effects to the story; but the doctor saw it all as Hardy had seen it before: the low, red sunset in the west, and the girl coming up the factory-road and sitting down on the stone at the foot of the hill to count her little hoard of factory savings, and the strange gentleman slipping off his horse and drawing near softly, and laying the five-dollar note by the small pile on the girl's knee.

"One who knew the swift, generous impulses of the fellow would not be surprised at anything of that sort," the doctor reasoned.

And again Berry's voice broke in, her face glowing out of its pinched sallowness: "Nobody ever heard of such a thing being done before, and afterward I found out who the gentleman was; and, though he was so fine and grand, he seemed just like a friend after all, and he always would, though I never spoke to him again; and when I heard about those dreadful murderers, and how he would certainly have died if the beautiful lady had not saved his life, it seemed to me I could go around the world to thank her just once," her eyes clouding with thick tears. "I knew who she was as soon as I caught sight of her face in the carriage."

"What odd bits of pathos and tenderness are always turning up, if only one looked deeply enough down into this human life of ours!" the doctor thought; and then Berry's next question came quick on her last period: "You think he will get well for certain?"

"Oh, yes; he is in the right road now, and quite out of danger."

Her smile shone out sweetly across the bright, unsteady lips, transforming all her homeliness into something very like beauty. "Hardy will be so glad to hear that too!" she said.

"Hardy is your brother, I imagine?"

"Yes; we are all that is left in the world to each other."

"Your brother works at the Mills, I suppose?"

A swift pain shot across the peaked face. The doctor saw that he had struck upon some live grief now. "He used to work there not very long ago," she said, in a low tone.

"Yes," said Dr. Avery. He was not a man to press secrets out of one.

Again the girl's glance went up to his face with the curious, half-doubtful look of a child: "But he was turned out not long ago."

The doctor began now to get hold of the secret of the pinched features and the general lack of heathful vitality, which told its own story of bitter poverty to his discerning eyes. "I'm sorry to hear that, Berry. How did it happen?"

"It was when the fight happened over there nearly three months ago."

"Oh, yes, I remember hearing about that," added the doctor.

"But Hardy was not to blame, — not any more than you or I, doctor. It was all a dreadful wrong and mistake," her whole manner eager, hurried, nervous, yet with the honest straightforwardness of profound conviction through it all.

"I do not know your brother, Berry," answered Dr. Avery, "but I should be very glad, for his sister's sake, to be satisfied of his innocence."

She choked over those words, their calm, wise kindness and interest going down into the sorest place of her grief. Berry had been a little morbid about talking over the matter with the neighbors, even though she was pretty certain of their sympathy, for Hardy had few enemies among his class.

But it did not come hard to tell the whole story to Dr. Avery, and the girl went over it from beginning to end, just as she had had it from her brother, — just as from her inmost soul she believed it. And although long experience had made Dr. Avery somewhat cautious in accepting only one side of a story, still, in this instance, there was nothing at all impossible. He knew the sort of rough justice which, in case of any insurrection among workmen, must be dealt out to the offenders; and it was not unlikely that the heaviest blows would fall where they were least deserved. An honest, quick-blooded fellow would have been likely to spring to the rescue of a friend under circumstances such as Berry had related, and it would be sufficient for Hardy Shumway's condemnation that he was found in the thick of the melée.

Poor Berry ! She had choked and stammered through her story, but when Dr. Avery put out his hand, and, patting her brown head, said in his voice full of kindness and sympathy and the cheeriest encouragement, "It was very hard, — very cruel on you and your brother; I wish I had known it sooner," the girl just broke right down, and her sobbing for a few moments was like a grieved baby's.

She had gone a-cold and a-hungry many times during the last three months without crying, and now a few words had overcome her like this.

But not for long. The tears were conquered in a few moments, and she looked up with her wet eyes, and her first words were still half a sob: "I am — so ashamed of myself; but we've had a great deal to go through, — Hardy and I; and when you spoke so kindly just now, it was more than I could bear."

"Don't go hunting after excuses, my poor child. You have carried yourself very bravely through a long and bitter trial," thinking that, whatever the brother might prove, the child there deserved more praise than it might be wise to bestow upon her. "You must have suffered a great deal in a great many ways," looking at the pinched cheeks, and reading a story there which cost the old man's heart a pang.

"I didn't mind it so much for my sake as for Hardy's. I was afraid the trouble would crush him;" and then in her simple, pathetic way, she went on to describe his unsuccessful effort to obtain work in the dead of winter; but she hardly touched upon the poverty both had borne, for the most part, silently.

By this time Dr. Avery found that he had long transcended the limits he had permitted for the visit.

He rose now, taking the little red hands in his. "Keep your warm, brave heart to the end, my little girl," he said. "Brighter days are always sure to come to such as you, and I think they're not far off. You've made a truer heroine, Berry, than many a fine lady would have done in your strait."

The wistful face quivered under his praise: "I could always have borne it, only sometimes in dreadful dark places, when it seemed as though God had forgotten us."

"Ah, those dreadful dark places!" repeated the doctor, remembering some gulfs in his own past. "I wonder if they don't come to every life of man or woman that has really lived? But I am getting out of your depth, child. Good-by, and don't forget what I say; the God you trusted will not fail you."

Berry stood in the door, following the mud-spattered old chaise up the road, with eyes in which the tears stood, and yet fairly radiant.

But the doctor, well started on his way, wheeled suddenly about and drew up before a butcher's stall, which aspired to the title of "Market" in the settlement. The best brace of chickens, a great succulent steak, a bunch of crisp celery, and a peck of big, mealy "Carolinas," all went into a covered basket, which was promptly ordered to the house of Hardy Shumway, the doctor adding no name nor message by which the inmates could find a clue to the donor, though Berry's keen wits would go straight as an arrow to the mark; the friends who could afford to send her fat chickens and juicy steaks being so few that she had no need to tell them off on her red, chilled fingers.

"She shall have one good dinner at least; I've secured that," muttered the doctor, as he bundled his square, broad figure once more inside of his chaise. "Her face shows it's been a long time since she had anything of that sort."

Then he settled himself back and fell into a brown study.

CHAPTER VIII.

At the stone cottage everything was going with wonderful smoothness these days. Young Whitmarsh was gaining ground every hour, his vital forces rallying at last with their native energy.

He could sit up every day now, and joke even while his wound was being dressed.

In accordance with Dr. Avery's advice, he was permitted to dwell as little as possible on the fatal night which came so very near bringing no sunrise to him; but for all that, Ben Whitmarsh knew whatever there was to tell, for the affair still remained shrouded in mystery as at the beginning.

The horse which the young man rode that night had been found at the stable-door in the early morning; the highwaymen perhaps fearing lest the animal's detention should furnish some clue to their discovery, he had probably been allowed to make his escape the moment his rider dropped off.

One significant fact here developed itself. The telegram which young Whitmarsh had received from his brother, authorizing him to draw five thousand dollars for the payment of the hands, had reached the latter in the morning.

The president of the bank was an old friend of the elder brother, and though the interview betwixt the gentlemen occupied considerable time, a small portion only was consumed in arranging their business.

It was settled that the money should be ready for Whitmarsh when he called in the afternoon.

The bank was an old building; an ambitious one, with columns and stone façade, being at this very time in process of erection in the town.

The president's office, where the conversation transpired, was a small inner apartment, at one end of which was a dark entry opening into a narrow alley, little used as a thoroughfare.

The room being uncomfortably warm that morning, the president had set the inner and outer door ajar,— a habit not unusual with him, — and he had quite lost sight of these open doors during the time he was engaged with his visitor.

A moment after the latter's disappearance some noise, like that of creaking footsteps in the entry, recalled the open doors to the gentleman's attention. He must have been a little startled, for long afterward he remembered getting up at the moment and going out into the entry, and even looking up and down the alley, but that was, as usual, silent and deserted.

The outer door, too, was closed, but, seeing nobody, the gentleman fancied that was the work of the wind, which was blowing freshly, and he was convinced the sounds he had heard came from the same source, and he carefully relocked and bolted the doors.

There was no doubt, however, in the minds of the detectives, who listened to the president's story and examined the premises, that some person had been secreted in the entry, and that it was retreating footsteps which at the time attracted the gentleman's attention. Indeed, he himself was of the same opinion. Every syllable of a conversation transpiring in ordinary tones in the president's room could be distinctly overheard in the entry; and it must have been in this way that the men who had attacked Benjamin Whitmarsh had learned the secret of the money which they supposed him to have in his possession on his road to Tuxbury that night.

But business promptness had not yet become a habit with the young man. His brother doubted whether it ever would; and when, to his amazement, he chanced upon an old travelling friend with whom he had scaled the Pyrenees, and jested and read poetry and talked philosophy and politics down the Rhine, Ben Whitmarsh was totally oblivious of time, living over the old events and landscapes again.

He was as much chagrined as it was in his good nature to be, when, on calling late in the afternoon, he found the bank closed and the president gone.

"John will be aggravated, and the men must go without their money another day. I hope the wives and babies won't suffer," muttered Ben Whitmarsh, putting spurs to his horse and whistling an old Spanish measure. The cold, yellow light faded in the west as he took the road toward Tuxbury and his fate.

After the first meeting, Marjorie Carruthers and he never alluded to *that* night. It was not a topic for ordinary conversation betwixt these two; but they found no lack of other subjects. They saw each other every day now, and lived over the old hours of dream and travel when life was a long æsthetic holiday to both, and neither knew the existence of the other.

"It was as good as going abroad one's self," Mrs. Whitmarsh told her husband. There were long, blue, sunny days on the Mediterranean, whose every singing wave had, to the highly cultured man and woman, historic voices telling of the beauty and glory that had perished; there was the enchanted ground of Italy to wander over; there were sunny France and golden Spain, and the old English castles and green meadows to haunt again; and Marjorie's eyes would open their mysteries of splendor, and the glow of her girlhood would kindle up her face again, and she would forget the chasm which lay betwixt those days and these at Tuxbury, — the chasm in which she had believed the best of her youth and life lay buried.

Marjorie Carruthers, too, had been fed from her childhood on the old English authors, "ripe, mellow, juicy fruits, fit for the gods," her uncle used to say. She had lisped Chaucer's sweet allegories and Spencer's stately rhythms when other children of her age had not fairly outgrown the magic of Mother Goose's melodies.

Drinking from her earliest memory at the old, sweet fountains of the youth of English literature, the girlhood of Marjorie Carruthers had been haunted by: —

"Those melodious bursts that fill
The spacious times of great Elizabeth
With sounds that echo still."

Here, too, the man and woman met on common ground, Benjamin Whitmarsh having had from his boyhood a passionate fondness for the "old marrowy Saxon." They were on "Philip Sydney," one afternoon when the doctor called. He was one of Marjorie's enthusiasms. When she was a girl and had her foolish dreams about some ideal lover, she used to wish Heaven had made her such an one as this historical English knight, courtier, gentleman, who in the sunset of the old chivalric age seems to stand out touched with its last radiance, the living embodiment of all its noblest, most gracious, and tenderest elements.

It so happened that Philip Sydney was one of the doctor's heroes too. "There are sayings of his that, if laid away on some shelf of one's youthful memory, will grow, like wine, sweeter and mellower through all the years of one's life."

"Let us have one, doctor," said Marjorie, leaning forward, her lips apart, while Ben Whitmarsh, now equal to dressing-gown and slippers, leaned back in his easy-chair, and his sister-in-law, a little on one side, gave herself in about equal proportions to the talk and her baby.

"There was one saying which I stowed away in my boyhood, and I've taken it out many a day since, looked at it and shaken it up, and I think it shines with a clearer radiance each time I ponder it; this is it: 'Doing good is the only certainly happy action of a man's life.' "

Each pondered the words a moment with serious, a little softened faces.

"It is very beautiful," added Marjorie, at last. "I suspect, however, one would have to live that sentence to know precisely what meaning is in it. Philip Sydney's speeches are usually of that sort."

Dr. Avery had been watching his time, sure that it would come: "Philip Sydney's words were like a wicker-gate which opened of its own accord into the path before him. What do you think of that, Whitmarsh?"

"I cannot make any better what Miss Carruthers has just said."

"But you can add something out of your own experience."

"Precious little there, doctor, — precious little," shaking his head with a smile, half amused, half sad.

"I know a little girl who would eagerly contradict that. I can see her little, peaked, brown face all alive as she did it," said Dr. Avery.

"Who in the world is she?" asked the invalid, with a good deal of interest; and his sister-in-law added, "Yes, do tell us, doctor, — who is she?"

"It was our little friend," turning to Miss Carruthers, "whom we met in our drive the other afternoon. I saw her yesterday."

Marjorie glanced in a rapid, undecided way toward the young man. It was evident he knew nothing of the incident which had transpired in her drive.

It had, of course, to come out now. Marjorie left it in the doctor's hands, and the story lost nothing there.

"I wanted to tell you, Ben, when Marjorie related it to me," said Eleanor; "but she absolutely denied me. Wasn't it a singular, touching incident?"

The story had undoubtedly moved young Whitmarsh, yet through it all he was perhaps thinking less of Berry Shumway than of the woman whom she had thanked for saving his life, and whose native delicacy shrank from his knowing that fact even.

"It must have been on your own account solely, Miss Carruthers," he said, when the doctor had finished, "that all this happened. The child has no reason to care whether I am dead or alive."

"Ah, but you're mistaken there, Whitmarsh," interposed Dr. Avery. "I had the facts from her own lips."

"You had, doctor?" with a glance of amazement. "What are they, then?"

The ladies leaned greedily forward. Dr. Avery cleared his throat with tantalizing coolness, enjoying the curiosity which he had purposely stimulated, and then he went on to relate his visit to Berry Shumway, and to give in her own simple, graphic words, the story of her meeting with Mr. Whitmarsh.

Nobody interrupted the doctor. He did not glance at the ladies, but he knew the very point at which his hearer's memory cleared up, by the look and smile which flashed into the face of Ben Whitmarsh.

"I remember it now," he said, "though I never should have recalled it again. I can't tell what freak possessed me at the moment. I did it as much for fun as anything, I fancy; and the quaint little figure seated there by the roadside and counting over its little hoard of money gave me a very natural desire to afford the child a surprise and pleasure. And so the little puss has been carrying it about with her all this time! One doesn't often get so much gratitude for so small an act."

"It was just like you for all the world, Ben, you dear old fellow! Nobody but you would have thought of doing it in that way," said Mrs. Whitmarsh.

Her husband, coming in meanwhile, had heard part of the story, and the doctor allowed them all for a while to make their comments; Miss Carruthers trying to turn it all into a joke, — she always did, anything which she felt deeply, — thanking Mr. Whitmarsh for his present to the factory-girl, as by that means she, Marjorie Carruthers, had been a witness to a bit of pretty, natural acting, and it was something to be a heroine even in a foolish little factory-girl's eyes.

"Oh, hush, Marjorie Carruthers! You don't mean one word of all you are saying," put in Mrs. Whitmarsh. "I must see that girl. What do you call her, doctor? How I wish I could do something for her!"

The iron was hot again. The doctor struck: "You can, my dear madam. It lies in your power to do a great and inestimable benefit to Berry Shumway."

The lady's voice was not the only one which cried out: —

"Let us know what it is!"

And again Dr. Avery told Berry Shumway's story, mostly in her own words, of the part her brother had borne in the riot among the workmen, and of his peremptory dismissal; of his failure to get employment elsewhere, and of all the long misery which had followed.

His hearers drank in the story, each one disposed to credit it, and full of sympathy for the brother and sister.

"O John, you must take the man back at once. Poor fellow! how he has suffered!" broke in Mrs. Whitmarsh, speaking the general feeling.

The head proprietor of the Tuxbury Mills was better acquainted with one side of human nature than his wife, and perhaps he had still a lurking doubt whether there might not be a different version of the English workman's part in the riot, — a version of which the young, innocent sister could be of course presumed to have no knowledge. But the man had a strong sense of justice, and in the present case was disposed to be merciful.

"It was difficult to discriminate at the time," he said. "Examples must be made, though the orders had been to punish only the ringleaders. In this case the fellow might have been as innocent as he professed himself, in which event nobody could regret what he had suffered more sincerely than the gentleman. At any rate, the workman should have another chance."

"Thank you, cousin John," said Marjorie Carruthers, warmly, giving him her hand.

"I think the girl's account of her brother's share in the fray, though she had it, of course, from his own lips, was substantially true," said Dr. Avery. "I have made inquiries, and find that he bears a good character among his fellow-workmen,— is honest and industrious."

"See here, John," exclaimed his brother, "I wish you'd let me have a hand in this matter. Let the first stroke of work I do, since I've come back to the world, be what Sir Philip Sydney calls 'a happy action.'"

"Go on, Ben," said the elder, looking at the younger with the indulgent smile which did not belong to the business face of John Whitmarsh. "What will you have?"

"Only a pen and paper," turning to the table near which he sat, and on which both happened to lie.

Everybody watched the young man as he slowly lifted his arm, for any sudden movement still made his wound twinge sharply. In the breathless silence he scratched a few words, and then handed them to his brother.

"If that is satisfactory, read it aloud;" and in a moment the elder read: —

> "MR. HARDY SHUMWAY: — If you choose to return to your work, your old situation is from this time open to you.
>
> "Your friend,
>
> "BENJAMIN WHITMARSH."

"I should like to be there to see that little girl's face when she reads that letter," said Dr. Avery.

"Poor child! Do, John, have it go this very night, so that a moment need not be lost," pleaded Eleanor.

Marjorie Carruthers turned and flashed on Benjamin

Whitmarsh one of those smiles which sometimes came to her face and gave it a marvellous beauty, — a beauty transcending all her other expressions; a smile of which a woman, coarse and poor, to whom Marjorie once did a thoughtful, gracious act, said afterward, "It was as if an angel had smiled upon me!"

"I think, Mr. Whitmarsh," said Marjorie Carruthers, "that must be one of the 'acts' which dear Philip Sydney called 'happy.'"

CHAPTER IX.

"HARDY," said Berry Shumway, bustling in from the kitchen to the front room, "that man has been here after you again, to-day."

Hardy was drying his feet before the fire. He had had a long tramp through the mud and snow, — a useless one, as usual, — and now the grateful warmth penetrated his chilled limbs, and his wide nostrils snuffed in greedily the savory smells from the kitchen, where Berry was getting ready a dinner, that seemed sumptuous to the man and girl, who had actually known the cravings of hunger a good many times during these last months.

Berry was in her element getting that supper, bustling about with her sleeves rolled up, and her little, deft, red hands as busy and happy as possible, taking naturally to the sort of work they were made for; and she hummed fragments of old tunes as she bustled back and forth, to which the sound of the chickens broiling at the fire made a pleasant accompaniment, and she thought how good God had been to her, and how many kind folks there were in the world, after all.

For the doctor's basket had arrived the night before, and Berry's eyes had danced until it seemed they must jump out of her little brown face with amazement and delight over chickens and steaks, and all the tempting things that flanked them.

No need the girl should cast about in her mind for the hand which reached itself out to their utmost need, so silently yet so generously. "It was that dear old Dr. Avery," she told Hardy, with swimming eyes, when he came home that night, and she opened the basket and showed him its contents, and then went over the doctor's visit.

Hardy seemed moved, as Berry had not seen him for weeks. She had not known what to make of him of late. His gloom and sulkiness had added largely to her worries, and more than once the glitter in his eyes, and the loud, hard laugh, and the fumes of his breath had sickened her.

But to-night Hardy was quite sober. Was it owing to his breakfast of smoking steak and mealy potatoes that he had eaten that morning?

"What man?" asked Hardy Shumway, setting his feet a little nearer the blaze. He knew perfectly well, though he asked the question.

"Why, that old Blatchley, who has been after you so many times of late. I don't see what he's hanging round here for, but he told me he wanted me to tell you he's goin' away from these parts, — had a call off on a whaler."

"You don't say so? Is Joe Blatchley really goin' off?" asked Hardy Shumway, his whole face lighting up, and a wonderful change in his manner.

"Yes, that's what he said," answered Berry, relieved to see her brother took the news in that way, and venturing to say now what had been on her tongue's end a good many times before: "I don't like that man, Hardy, I'm glad he's going off. I know there's something bad in him!"

"How do you know, Berry?" turning his gaze from her face to the blaze.

"I had a good look at his eyes while he talked. There was something bold and bad in them, which never could be with a good man. Then he put his hand on my shoulder — ugh! it made me shudder all over!"

Hardy started up now, the broad, stolid face hot with wrath: "What business had Joe Blatchley to put his hand on you?" he growled. "If I'd been here, I'd knocked his old carcass to the other end of the room."

"I shook off his hand as though it was slimy pis'n, and I didn't breathe free until he'd got out of sight. I al'ays wondered what he was after you so much for. But I'm glad he's gone off, where he'll never come back again."

"Yes, I'm glad the fellow's gone," said Hardy, drawing a low breath of relief, the blaze going down in his eyes. "Did he leave any word for me?"

The question seemed to come hard, as though it stuck in his throat or thoughts, the whole manner strangely in contrast with his recent outbreak of rage. There was a quick, strong life down somewhere, in the slow, heavy workman.

"He said there was things he'd like to talk over with you, and a little money that was your share he'd settle when he came back. I didn't s'pose you had any to lend him, Hardy, but that's what he said;" a good deal of surprise in her tones, of curiosity too.

"No matter about that. 'Twasn't much," said Hardy, with a sudden twinge through all his heavy frame, as though something had stung him.

Berry saw that enough had been said, and she turned to go out to the kitchen, when there was a loud knock at the door. Hardy rose up and opened it. A boy stood there, who inquired if that was Hardy Shumway's, and then put a letter in the man's hand and disappeared.

Hardy went back to the fire, examined curiously the address in its bold, strange characters, then opened the letter and read.

In a moment Berry fluttered back. "Didn't I hear somebody at the front door just now?" she asked. Then she caught a glimpse of her brother's face, with some stunned, horrified look in it, and of the letter in his hand.

"Oh, what has happened?" she cried out, sharply.

Hardy held up the letter to his sister. "Read that," he said, in a slow, dazed way, like that of a man who has had some terrible hurt which has fairly stunned him.

Berry Shumway leaned breathlessly over her brother's shoulder and read. There were not more than three lines. It was the letter Benjamin Whitmarsh had written to the English workman.

A cry, sharp with wonder and delight, shot out of Berry's lips. Then, in her delirium of joy, she caught

Hardy about the neck and hugged and kissed him and cried and laughed together: "O Hardy, our troubles are all over now. To think you are really going back to work again, and that gentleman has done it, and in such a way too! which makes it better than ever, signing himself, 'Your friend,' not 'Yours, etc.,' or 'Yours respectfully,' but 'Your friend,' just like an equal!" the happy tears thick on her face while she talked.

Hardy glanced at the letter with something in his eyes like horror or fear. Then he turned and looked at his sister: "Berry," in a low, choked voice, "I can't go back to work at the old place again. If anybody else had sent for me —" checking himself there, and still looking in a scared way at the letter in Berry's hand.

"Not go back to Tuxbury Mills to work!" fairly shrieked Berry. "Hardy Shumway!"

"You don't know, Berry. 'Taint no use our talkin'. To think young Whitmarsh has sent for me!" shuddering all through his frame. "I must get work away from here."

The man seemed to be muttering to himself, yet there was a sort of goaded look in his eyes. Berry began to fear lest the long misery had shaken her brother's wits.

"O Hardy, would you go and leave me all alone here?"

The brother looked at his sister, and some tenderness struggled up through all the blank of his face: "I aint much good to you, Berry," he said. "You'd be better off without me, any way."

"It's wicked and cruel in you to say that, Hardy

Shumway. And you know I'm all you've got, and it would kill me dead if you should go away and leave me alone; but you won't do it, you dear old fellow; I know you won't," patting his shoulder as though he were a baby. "You'll just stay here and take care of me, and go back to your work, and we'll have the old happy times again, and forget all about our troubles. Don't you know I said there was a good God, Hardy, who would help us out of the worst, some time?"

"Yes, I remember you said that, Berry;" but there was no heartiness in his voice, only a kind of dead level of despair.

"And now he's done all this for you and me, and you won't take the good he's sent. O Hardy, do look up; don't act so dreadful!"

There was something wistful in his eyes that touched the girl to the quick when her brother drew her round to him: "I think, Berry, this God you talk about must love you if he loves anybody, little sister."

It was only once in a great while, when she was sick, or some grief on her part brought out his tenderest mood, that Hardy Shumway called her by that name.

"As though he didn't love you too, Hardy! He knows how kind and good you are."

"Don't talk that way, Berry," a groan all through the words. "But I think he knows that I care a good deal about you."

"And you are not going off, Hardy, — you will never speak of that dreadful thing again. Father and mother and all are gone; only you, and I shall be left all alone. What will become of me?"

The man rose up suddenly and dragged himself up and down the room. She could hardly see his face, for it was growing dark now.

"If any other man in the world had written that letter, — any other man, — I might go back," she heard Hardy say; and somehow his voice sounded far off, like that of a man crying out of abysses of darkness, or from toils in which he had been caught and strangled.

"Was her brother's brain really crazed?" Berry thought with a shudder. But she went up to him, taking his big hand in both her warm ones, and saying, "Promise me, Hardy, you will go back to Tuxbury to work, or it will break my heart."

He stood still a minute or two, while she waited, trembling. At last he said, "God knows, Berry, if I go back there, it will be for your sake, for I'd rather cut my right hand off than do it."

She led him back to the fire, and seated him in his chair, as though the strong, healthy man were a helpless child, and then she set to work finishing the meal, a little sobered by her brother's manner, and yet very happy for all that. When once Hardy had really got back to work, things would be all right, she reasoned to herself. The old life and labor would once more steady his brain, that had been almost shattered by their long misery.

Once in a while, when she brushed past him, he looked at her in a kind of helpless, wistful way, as though he clung to her for something she alone of all the world could give him, and once or twice she heard him mutter, "There's judgments! There's judgments!"

But Berry Shumway paid no attention to talk of that sort; she only got her supper ready a little faster. She was a helpful, sensible little soul, and had great faith in the efficacy of a good, warm meal and a few cheery words to comfort hearts and brains strained and unsteady with long griefs.

That was all that ailed Hardy, she reasoned, and she brought him at last to the smoking board, and waited on him with a sort of eager, motherly air, that was pretty and touching to see, and chirupped like a bird about all the good things that had happened; and sometimes a smile would come out and rest on Hardy's face for a moment, but it was sure to vanish whenever Berry mentioned, as she was doing all the time, with passionate gratitude and with all the overflowing warmth and admiration of her years and nature, the name of Benjamin Whitmarsh.

The next morning Berry and her brother started off together for the Furnace. His working hours fell earlier than hers, but Berry had settled it in her mind that she would accompany Hardy on this first morning. Excitement had kept her awake the night before; and although it had been, on the whole, of the happiest sort, she had gone over with her brother's looks and words that evening with real anxiety, still attributing the whole to the long strain of body and soul which he had undergone.

Hardy was quiet enough next morning; but then there was something in his face that did not just satisfy his sister.

He brightened up, however, when she expressed her intention of walking over with him, and they started off together. It was a wonderfully pleasant morning in Tuxbury, the early light quivering among the naked branches, and cheering up the bare, frozen earth, off which the late rain-storms had stripped the winter snows.

Berry felt in her very blood that the spring was coming, and her own heart was like a water-course among the hills, flowing down with singing and laughter to meet the river.

She tripped by her brother's side, chattering all the time, with a glance thrown out to pick up anything which was striking or pleasant in their way.

As they drew near Piebald Mountain, where the dreadful event had occurred which had shaken the whole country around with horror, Berry looked up suddenly in her brother's face, and some look of dumb, hunted misery there made her heart fairly stand still a moment.

"Don't go that way," he spoke, in a low, rapid voice. "The other is longer, but we can walk faster."

Berry turned off without a word into the road which led round by the meadows, and which was a good half mile longer than the short cut by the mountain. For herself, she had been that way a good many times, for there was some downright warmth and heartiness about the girl to which morbid superstitions could not easily cling, and she thought oftener of her meeting with young Whitmarsh than she did of the terrible scene which had transpired so near the spot where she first beheld him.

But she was ready in his present mood to humor her brother's whims and fancies to any extent, although Berry herself was no angel, and had at times her little, peremptory tempers and notions, which latter were sufficiently stubborn; but there was one thing you could always be sure of, and that was the warm, impulsive heart, the native honesty and truthfulness of Berry Shumway.

At last they reached the great Mills. Berry walked with her brother to the door, watching him with a little unacknowledged fear. He stopped there; a kind of chill seemed to go all over the burly figure.

Berry had a vague instinct through all their walk that morning, that her brother was acting a part, schooling himself to enter into her mood, and into the little commonplace interests and talk with which she had tried to beguile the way.

Now the wistful, appealing look she remembered last night came into Hardy's eyes, — beyond that some unutterable anguish.

He groaned out betwixt his set jaws, "As I'm a livin' man, all the world couldn't have dragged me here, Berry, if it hadn't been for your sake, — if it hadn't been for your sake!"

Just then a gang of the workmen came along, so there was no time for any more words.

But Berry reached up her face to her brother and kissed him; and I think that child's innocent, loving kiss strengthened and steadied the man, so that he went in, without another word, to his work.

CHAPTER X.

As the spring advanced, Benjamin Whitmarsh began to get about the house once more with slow, groping steps and short breaths, at first, much like a baby's or an old man's, it is true, but with some added strength and steadiness each time; and it was a grand epoch in the household, you may be certain, when the man took his first drive with his brother, going a whole mile and back in the noon of a soft spring day, the air all tremulous with sweet south winds, like the heart of a young girl a-quiver with its first dream of love, and among the willow branches a faint green, much like a thin, creeping mist; but it was in reality the outer scroll of the great emblazoned banner of the spring, so soon to be flaunting over every bare hill-top and river-side and valley.

Bowling along in the easy carryall, his head propped among the cushions, Ben Whitmarsh took note of all these things, fancying he felt a little as Dante must when he looked up and saw the stars shining over him after that dreadful passage through Inferno. The world had always looked pleasant in the eyes of Benjamin Whitmarsh. Why shouldn't it to a young man with sturdy health, every drop of blood in his veins clear and pure, seeming to have its own live sparkle like champagne; a young man without a care, with money enough, with a keen relish of that best side of enjoyment which the world has to offer, — the side of art, of intellectual culture, and of travel; a young man, too, who had no foul memories to haunt his thought and imagination like flocks of unclean birds? What wonder that the world had looked pleasant in the eyes of Benjamin Whitmarsh, for what was there yet to give it a shadow?

Yet his ideal hero, Philip Sidney, had all this, and he had said, "The only certainly happy action of a man's life is doing good."

Benjamin Whitmarsh had thought of that sometimes since Dr. Avery had quoted it; but then he had thought of a good many things in a new way during his illness.

The world had never looked so dear, so pleasant, to him as it did on this morning. She seemed to welcome him back from the dead with a smile of tender exultation on her face, like a mother's. It brought the tears into his eyes through all the strong, solemn joy of the moment. Then he thought how this pleasant world would never have had anything better to offer him than a dark underground bed a few feet wide in her ample bosom, if it had not been for one woman, — one woman who had come to the gate when he drove off and stood among the others with her beautiful face full of pleased, eager solicitude which softened all its pride; in fact, the whole household assembled as to a kind of jubilee. They were on the veranda awaiting Ben Whitmarsh when he returned and got into the house with the help of his brother's arm, pretty thoroughly worn out by his exertion, but none the worse for it.

With his recovery, of course the young man's spirits began to regain their old, high-tide mark, although they ebbed away into graver moods oftener than before. Still, he protested that he had made the discovery that semi-invalidism was the happiest condition of human life. You could in that condition lay with absolute impunity hands and feet of a whole household under perpetual tribute; you could be the most arrogant and exacting of tyrants; you could be watched and cosseted and coaxed and cuddled enough to ruin the temper and stomachs of an army of healthy babies. As for him, he frankly owned he was undone. John and Eleanor and Miss Carruthers, with their tending and trotting, had quite taken the manliness out of him. What was left was poor, limp, washed-out material, just good for nothing but to be bundled up and set down in the warmest corner, to be waited on the rest of his life.

Everybody laughed at talk like this. "Never mind, Mr. Whitmarsh," Miss Carruthers, would say, "when we get you quite sound again, you shall have a tough seasoning to pay for all this petting. The old Spartan discipline shall be nothing to it."

Miss Carruthers had changed wonderfully since that night when Benjamin Whitmarsh had been brought home to her for dead. How soft and gentle and altogether charming she was these days, I cannot tell. The old pride and tempers and moods seemed all gone, or at least held in the background.

From the first, young Whitmarsh had admired her excessively. How could he help it? Such a woman as she ! — her beauty, her grace, her rare gifts of mind, acted like a fine stimulant on all his powers. She kept him on his mettle, too, with her haughty tempers and the swift dazzle of her wit. But Benjamin Whitmarsh was not in love with Marjorie Carruthers. He was a man well among his thirties, and he had had his fancies, but he had outgrown the moonstruck, rhyming, serenading period, and all that nonsense. Every year he thought less about matrimony, although he still had his beau-ideal of a woman after his own heart, — some sweet, blushing, graceful little creature, all dimples and devotion; but he had never come across her yet, or, if he had, she had never laid firm enough hold on his thought and heart to have him place his happiness in her dainty little hands.

Sometimes during the first weeks of his visit at Tuxbury, the young man would say to his sister-in-law, "That cousin of yours is a splendid creature, Eleanor; but, saints defend us ! what a wife she'd make ! Where do you suppose the benedict is to be found with coolness and courage to tame such a Beatrice? Why, she'd look an ordinary man into nonentity with one scornful blaze of those great, beautiful eyes of hers ! "

Mrs. Whitmarsh was half amused, half dismayed, to have her brother-in-law go on at this rate. She loved Ben, she adored Marjorie; and if there was anything in the world she had set her heart on, it was to have these two fall in love with each other.

But the most skilful match-maker would have found Marjorie Carruthers a most difficult card to play.

It was probable that Eleanor Whitmarsh might say to her cousin with impunity what no other human being could, but when it came to seriously facing her with a matrimonial suggestion, Mrs. Whitmarsh had not the courage to do it.

But she always stood strongly on the defensive when her cousin was the subject of conversation. "Marjorie is a noble creature, Ben; even her faults are generous and open like herself, while all that is sweet and fine and true in her — Well, you do not know her as I do."

"Now, Eleanor, don't misapprehend me. A fellow talks at random, you know, when he gets started; but with regard to Miss Carruthers' character we should not disagree at bottom. There is something innately grand and noble in her. Whatever her faults are of pride and mood, there is nothing mean or petty or commonplace about her, — a royal woman, Eleanor."

Such praise as this half appeased Mrs. Whitmarsh, whose dearest wishes again took courage; for Ben, when he talked in that way, never said more than he meant; and yet when she came to remember that if Ben was eager to woo, there was Marjorie to be won, her heart failed her, her pretty, rose-colored visions fading away like clouds at sunrise.

The two certainly liked each other, enjoyed their talks and jests and their reading and arguments. Mrs. Whitmarsh was secure so far, but no farther.

After the dreadful tragedy of one night at Tuxbury the man and woman met on different ground. Some new feeling was brought out betwixt them. Benjamin

Whitmarsh could never look at Marjorie Carruthers without an ever-present consciousness that but for her he had been cut down out of the living in the pride and strength of his early manhood. Whatever she might be, this woman, for the rest of his days, must stand apart, sacred and reverenced in his thought above all women, — in some sense even above the woman of his loving.

And since that night Miss Carruthers could not look on the man whose life she had preserved as she could upon other men. For him she had looked Death in the face, wrestled with this latter when all other hearts and hands had fallen back fainting and affrighted.

The experience of that night had exalted and softened the girl. Its memory filled her heart now with a kind of reverent gratitude, and although neither the man nor the woman ever alluded to what was past, there was an under-consciousness with both which betrayed itself in the manner of each toward the other.

They had their talk and jests and disputes as usual, disagreeing in their opinions of books, pictures, and of great historical and contemporary characters, — for these two young people's talk swept the wide circle of human life and thought, and, to quote Mrs. Whitmarsh again, "It was about as hard to keep up with them as it was to read 'Paradise Lost' without a pile of classical dictionaries and enyclopædias at hand," — but, for all that, she was never on nettles now, as was formerly the case, lest the disputes should run high, and one of these two should give mortal offence to the other.

They were more than acquaintances — friends even —

to each other now; as far as possible from lovers perhaps; still between them was the mighty tie of a life rescued.

Marjorie kept full as narrow a watch on Ben Whitmarsh's imprudences as Eleanor did, and took him to task for his recklessness during his convalescence, and the fellow made wry faces and witty jests, and on the whole was obedient.

Those were smooth, happy days at Tuxbury. Poor Mrs. Whitmarsh, with her rosy little programme all nicely arranged, fluttered betwixt her baby and the young people in a tremulous hope: "After all that had happened, Fate couldn't be so cruel as to keep these two apart. Ben and Marjorie *must* fall in love with each other, or what a romance would be spoiled!"

Dr Avery was in the midst of the hilarious group which greeted the young man on his return from his first ride.

"Ah, my young friend," grasping his patient's hand at the door, "you've transcended orders this time."

"I instigated the mutiny, doctor, and you must visit the punishment on my head. It's the ringleaders who suffer in a revolt," answered John Whitmarsh, taking off his hat and bowing to the doctor with the air of a culprit awaiting his sentence. The manner in which his brother had borne the drive had put the elder in excellent spirits.

But, in the course of the mock examination which followed, it came out that the doctor had driven around with the express purpose of giving his patient an airing in his chaise.

"He has stood it so well this time," said John Whitmarsh, gazing at his brother, who sat, looking pale but animated enough, in the easy-chair where the two ladies had seen that he was at once bestowed, "that I think in a week or two I shall carry him over to the Works to display him to the men there. What a hero he will be among them all!"

"Poor souls! out of what stuff they'll make him!" laughed the younger brother.

"When that time comes, we shall all go, — you and I, Marjorie; and what a heroine you will be too!"

Mrs. Whitmarsh was wonderfully on her guard of late, — one had to be with that sensitive, high-strung Marjorie. The clause slipped out before she was aware. She saw her mistake in a moment.

"Excuse me, Eleanor," with a little of the old hauteur in her tones, "but if the stocks had not gone out of fashion long ago, I would set myself there when I desired to be stared at."

"Of course, nobody would ever suspect you of any desire of that sort, Marjorie dear; only it struck me that we would make a nice little family group, and you would not mind the staring. 'A cat may look upon a king.'"

"Yes, but what if the king has not a kingly soul, and resents the staring?" Then the talk she had had with the doctor, on the day they drove out together, flashed across her. She glanced toward him and met the kindly eyes with the shrewd twinkle in them. "Ah, Doctor Avery," she cried, with one of those changes of mood which came suddenly upon her in such contrast with all her imperiousness, and which was as natural to Miss Carruthers as its native fragrance to a rose, "I proved that to you one day."

"Proved what, my child?"

"That I had not a kingly or queenly soul."

"Miss Carruthers, nobody shall ever say that but yourself where I am," answered a voice near where she stood.

She turned and looked at Benjamin Whitmarsh, and a smile came into her face and filled it with marvellous sweetness. She had other smiles, — haughty and defiant, yet bright as the glitter of sunshine on ice: "Ah, you think so, but it is not true," some sadness clinging all through the little cluster of monosyllables.

"A queenly soul," repeated the convalescent, slowly. "I had not been here to say it now, Miss Marjorie, if you had not proved it to me *once* — ONCE!"

He had hardly alluded to that night since their first interview by his bedside.

"But a single act, though it were a great heroism, would hardly prove one's title good to that name; nevertheless, it is pleasant. I thank you, Mr. Whitmarsh," the smile of touched sweetness and humility coming out on her face as no flattery could have brought it. Marjorie was so used to that, that she scorned it mostly.

Seeing that smile, there somehow rose beside it the face of Benjamin Whitmarsh's ideal woman, all the pink and dimples and prettiness, insipid and inane as a doll's beside the fine, delicate outlines of this other woman's face.

"Pish!" muttered Ben Whitmarsh to himself, starting a little.

"Do you feel uncomfortable, Ben?" asked Mrs. Whitmarsh, who saw the movement.

"No, Eleanor; don't bother yourself. If you must know the truth, it happened to strike me then what an asinine fool I'd been making of myself all my days."

"I've been often struck of a sudden with just that conviction about myself!" said Dr. Avery, lifting his heavy brows.

"Well, I must say, Ben, you are as incomprehensible as — as Marjorie here." It was evident that Mrs. Whitmarsh thought the emphasis of her comparison could no farther go.

Everybody laughed, and, whether it conveyed a compliment to her or not, Miss Carruthers seemed to enjoy her cousin's remark: "Poor Eleanor!" looking with a kind of amused tenderness at the lady, "I know I must be a perpetual thorn in your side."

CHAPTER XI.

THE projected visit to the Mills, or more properly to the smelting-works, did not transpire for several weeks, during which time Ben Whitmarsh made rapid progress on the road to health, going out every pleasant day, taking longer drives each time, and throwing off more and more the rules and habits of the convalescent period.

John Whitmarsh was at this juncture in an unusually busy phase. He was opening a road betwixt the cotton-mills and his great iron furnace works, and the tunnelling of the steep mountain which separated the two valleys, in one of which stood the factories, in the other the vast smelting-works, was no small enterprise for private achievement, and, even under the management of skilled engineers and workmen, demanded the general supervision of the proprietor.

The opening of the road, however, would not only facilitate communication between all the mills, — furnaces and factories being both included in this designation in the vernacular of Tuxbury, — but would largely diminish the distance to the ore-beds, which lay a mile to the north of the settlement, the drivers and draught horses, with their heavy wagons laden with the ore, making a constant procession from the beds to the Mills, the mountain now being tunnelled lying right in their path and compelling a circuit of nearly a mile of very hilly road.

When the time came for the family visit to the Mills, Whitmarsh the elder was suddenly summoned to the mountain to decide some doubtful question of engineering. Dr. Avery was, however, on hand, as he had been invited to join the party, and the ladies were in waiting. The gentleman insisted the expedition should not be deferred on account of his absence. "The doctor and his brother made a force strong enough to escort the ladies around the works."

Miss Carruthers had not again demurred to this visit to the Mills. If she had any secret repugnance to being stared at, she kept it to herself. Indeed, Marjorie had been so gracious and acquiescent all these weeks, and everything had gone on so smoothly betwixt her and Ben Whitmarsh, that the head of his sister-in-law was busier than ever with her rose-colored visions of weddings and bridal favors and pretty nonsense of that sort.

They were a merry little party going over the works that afternoon. Squads of brawny-chested, heavy-framed, grimy-faced workmen followed everywhere, with curious, half-amused, half-awed glances, the gentleman who had been so nearly murdered, and the beautiful lady who had brought him back almost from the dead. Whatever human tenderness lay deep in the souls of those coarse, grimy men had been stirred by the story they had heard.

The staring, though she was conscious enough of it, and though Eleanor was on thorns for her sake, did not affect Marjorie. There was some element in it this time which lifted the staring out of simple rudeness, — some half-reverent, half-grateful feeling, which touched the girl.

The little party moved around, in the vast dark spaces of the buildings, among the different gangs of sooty workmen, watching these tend the fires and trundle the heavy wheelbarrows of ore and weigh the vast masses and swing up the elevators and heap the cars, — a noisy, deafening hive, — and they quoted bits of the classics and fiery lines of Dante, at least young Whitmarsh and Miss Carruthers did, and the latter's cousin shrugged her pretty shoulders sometimes and said, "O doctor, these people have mounted their Pegasus, and it's dreadfully hard for my poor little brains to keep pace with them."

At last they mounted into a kind of upper gallery which commanded a wide view of the busy groups beneath. There was a detachment of workmen up here also; two long rows, which reminded them of files of soldiery, and there was the same half-curious, half-touched stare on the dull sooty faces, as the party swept by, seeming, in their grace and daintiness, almost like beings from another sphere.

One of the foremen accompanied the strangers. A sudden thought struck Mrs. Whitmarsh, and she turned to the officer, saying, "Among your hands there is one named Hardy Shumway; I have a curiosity to see him."

"That's the man, ma'am," pointing to one of the file so near where they stood that the man must have heard his name, for he turned suddenly and confronted the others.

A young man in blue overalls, a massive, rough-hewn fellow, with broad face and heavy jaws, which gave a certain character of obstinacy to the whole expression; yet through the coarseness and homeliness there was nothing repugnant. Ben Whitmarsh stepped right forward with a peculiar warmth of feeling toward this man, as the solitary one to whom he had done an especial favor. He put out his hand: "I am glad to see you here, my friend." If you knew the man, and the frank, gracious way in which Ben Whitmarsh, of all men, could say and do this thing!

Something came into the workman's eyes — was it pain or terror? — when he heard that voice. It seemed as though, in the dull light an awful pallor overspread his face, and he stood still, staring at young Whitmarsh without saying one word; some hunted anguish in his eyes, like a wild animal's standing at bay; and though he remained quite still, a spasm went all over the massive limbs. The man's mouth worked too, as though he were trying to speak; he put his great hand in the long, delicate fingers of Benjamin Whitmarsh, but the slender one seemed to hold more strength and vitality just now than its brawny neighbor.

The young man was quite taken by surprise at this sudden evidence of feeling on the workman's part. He supposed that Shumway was overcome, remembering the letter and all he had gone through before it came. He felt more kindly than ever toward the young workman.

But at that moment Miss Carruthers drew up to them. She, too, had seen the look in the face of the mill-hand, and it had touched her.

"This is Berry's brother, I believe, and therefore I must shake hands with you also, Mr. Shumway," she said.

He turned and looked on the smiling, beautiful face of the woman by his side, — a face that shone in the eyes of the dull workman sweet and gracious as a queen's or an angel's. A change came all over his, like the thrill of sudden sunshine. His eyes warmed and brightened out of their cold horror into something of warmth and gratitude and worship. He took the dainty hand a moment, and looked at it with a curious wistfulness as it lay in his brawny fingers, and then he spoke: "O ma'am, if Berry was here, she would know how to thank him; I can't."

"There is no need, my good fellow," answered Whitmarsh, and then Hardy Shumway turned and glanced at him fearfully again; and so for a moment they stood still, confronting each other, — Benjamin Whitmarsh and Hardy Shumway, — the former thin and pale yet, but with that indescribable air of culture and grace which nobody could mistake; the latter, the big-framed, squarely built workman, each seeming to emphasize the contrasts of the other to everybody who had an eye for picturesque effects of that sort.

Dr. Avery and Mrs. Whitmarsh had their turn now, each being presented to young Shumway by Ben; and the lady smiled kindly on him, and the old doctor said a few pleasant words, to which Hardy answered with a gleam of honest feeling in his eyes and smile: "I'm always hearin' about you from Berry, sir."

"I set a very high value on Berry's good opinion," answered the doctor. "She is a shrewd little girl, and her heart is as warm and true as her wits are bright."

You saw in a moment those words had gone to the quick; a red glow spread all over the man's face, and a smile, bright and pleased as a girl's, loosened the heavy jaws: "She'll be happy when she comes to hear that. Berry is a good girl, sir."

They moved on in a moment, bowing their good-bys.

"How terribly scared he did seem when the fellow first looked at Ben! Did you observe it, doctor?" chirruped Mrs. Whitmarsh.

"Yes, it struck me as very singular at the time. That man must have gone through a great deal with poverty or something else," still pondering the workman's look in his thoughts.

Murmurs of admiration and curiosity followed the party on their tour through the buildings. Nobody, however, paid any attention to these, even when scraps of talk came to their ears; but, when they all had reached one of the long rooms on the ground floor and were watching the ascent of the elevators, some comments among a group of men outside floated to Miss Carruthers.

"I say, Jack, the young chap ought to marry the beautiful lady. It is the least he could do to show his gratitude, after all she's done for him."

"That's a fact, Pete. It's the man's bounden duty to offer himself, and it won't be fair on the lady if he don't face the music. It's lucky for him, seein' she saved his life, that she's such a beauty."

Then there was a hoarse laugh or two that rasped Miss Carruthers' nerves terribly. I believe, if she could have swept out and annihilated those men with one blaze of her scornful eyes, she would have been tempted to do it. Her face was at a very white heat of anger as she turned toward the rest of the party.

Not one of them seemed to have heard the talk. They were still absorbed in the ascent of the elevators, and afterward, having accomplished the tour of the buildings, they proceeded homeward.

"Something has gone wrong with Marjorie," thought Mrs. Whitmarsh by the time they had reached their own door. "What can it be?"

But Dr. Avery had a key to the change in Marjorie's mood, having overheard the workmen's talk, which Mrs. Whitmarsh had not.

Riding home a few minutes later, the old man shook his head gravely. "Pity, pity she should overhear it," he muttered to himself. "With her high spirits and morbid sensitiveness too. Stray arrows of that sort wouldn't gall so keenly, though, in sound flesh. Ah, my child, you have a heart, but you are as proud as Lucifer, and I see trouble ahead — trouble ahead;"

and meditating over all this, Dr. Avery forgot the look which had struck him in the eyes of Hardy Shumway.

Marjorie Carruthers paced up and down her room that night, her nerves like fire or ice, the careless, gross talk of the workmen haunting her thoughts like the midnight screeching of birds; but, worse than that, they seemed arrows tipped with venom, finding some sore place in the girl's soul.

Marjorie's pride, strong and deep as her life, had taken the alarm. "What if people should fancy she had saved Benjamin Whitmarsh's life, because she was — " She could not face the thought now. Its weight seemed to fairly crush her to the earth. Then there flashed across her memory old ballads and romances of what women had suffered for the sake of the man they loved, following them to the camp and the battle-field in disguises of page and armor-bearer. There was Eleanor of Castile, for instance; she had sucked the poison from her lord's wound, and been famous forever afterward.

"Did the world believe women ever did these heroic things except for their love's sake?" her cheeks hot like fire. She — Marjorie Carruthers — had never in her whole life felt so utterly appalled. What if Ben Whitmarsh had thought the same thing? For the moment she almost wished she had left him there to die — not so much as lifted a hand in his extremity. As though she would not have done precisely the same thing for the meanest wretch on God's earth, if he had been laid before her in just that plight!

But who would believe this? No doubt the workmen spoke the universal conviction — very probably that of Ben Whitmarsh himself!

Men were vain creatures at the best, and why should he be an exception to his sex? No doubt he felt immensely grateful and all that to the woman who had saved his life; and he was a generous fellow. What if, taking the matter into grave consideration, he should come to the very legitimate conclusion that duty required him to offer his heart and hand to Miss Carruthers, — that this was, in short, the only proper and graceful method in which he could cancel the great obligation under which the signal proof of her regard had placed him?

How the scornful irony of her thoughts stung and lashed the proud, stormy, weak, noble nature of the woman!

She, Marjorie Carruthers, wooed out of a sense of duty, gratitude, by living man!

Then the girl remembered, with a start of dismay, all the long, pleasant intimacy of the weeks of Ben Whitmarsh's convalescence. How blind she had been! No doubt the fellow regarded her manner as corroborative of that most hateful suspicion. It seemed to her that she could have almost torn herself in pieces with rage at her folly. There were John and Eleanor, too, — keeping their thoughts, of course, religiously to themselves, but no doubt having them all the same.

But it was not too late for some change in her bearing toward young Whitmarsh; and, fortunately enough, he had not overheard that vile talk this afternoon. Marjorie believed she should have died of chagrin in that case.

"Let Benjamin Whitmarsh *dare* to ask me to be his wife out of duty, gratitude!" cried Marjorie Carruthers, all alone to herself, looking like a beautiful angry Pythoness; and she brought down her clenched hand on the mantel, and left a cruel bruise on her wrist, and did not feel it.

The pride of this woman was a terrible thing: one side of it was the worst fault of Marjorie Carruthers.

Downstairs, on the veranda, in the soft spring night, Benjamin Whitmarsh sat thinking his thoughts too. Marjorie was mistaken; he had overheard the talk of the workmen, and it haunted his thoughts also.

"The poor fools!" he muttered to himself. "Marry such a woman as Marjorie Carruthers for duty, gratitude, —anything of that sort!" Then he thought of her as he had known her during these last few weeks, in her sweetness and gentleness and beauty, the radiant, noble, lofty creature. She had her faults; but now he believed that he liked those even better than the virtues of other women. He thought of her fine, generous nature, of the gifts and culture of a mind that always stimulated his own, acting on his thought like wine in his veins; he thought of what it would be to always live with her, to love her, protect her, cherish her; and, sitting there under God's eternal stars, his heart took her into it, the woman of its love.

There came across him once or twice the memory of his young ideal, looking so stupid and inane by the side of this creature, all alive with spirit, thought, feeling, that he shook off the old fancy, half cursing himself for his stupidity. Yet in his whole life I think Benjamin Whitmarsh had never been quite so good a man as at this moment — never felt so keen a sense of his own unworthiness.

If the first knowledge of love for any woman does not make a man both humbler and better in his secret soul, it is poor stuff for them both; and the years, trying so sharply what it is made of, will be likely to find the texture flimsy and threadbare enough.

Benjamin Whitmarsh saw clearly, looking over the past, how his love for Marjorie Carruthers had unconsciously, on his part, wrought itself into his very being, and, in the new tenderness which exalted while it softened and steadied the whole man, his life and that of all other lives of men and women took on new and holier significance to him. It was better than the old, rambling, æsthetic one, whose issues were all in himself, to live with this woman, protect her weakness, make wider her joys, to minister to her; if need were, to suffer for her; and the years opened before him in great, luminous spaces, until the strong man's heart fairly shook within him like a frightened maiden's.

Then he thought of Marjorie; could he ever win that rare, fine, proud spirit, soft like dew and swift and dazzling like fire? The might of his own love made him steady and strong to put all at stake. Yet he hardly once thought to-night of what she had done for him, far less of any claim of gratitude she held on him. It was his heart's allegiance, which no debt nor duty could have bought, that Benjamin Whitmarsh offered Marjorie Carruthers. It was for her own sake, not even for his life preserved, that he loved her. Overhead was the solemn shining of the April stars. They had looked down on him like this in wide, still horizons of desert, on rocking oceans, on mountain heights of eternal snows, and in valleys that were little cool idyls of beauty and fragrance; but to-night the stars of God touched his soul with new and tenderer meanings, and out of a softened, reverent heart, Benjamin Whitmarsh, taking off his hat, rose up and thanked God.

CHAPTER XII.

BERRY SHUMWAY sat by the window in the pleasant afternoon sunshine, knitting a muffler; flocks of pleasant thoughts alive in her face, twinkling in her eyes, and glancing about her lips in smiles, which just touched them with brightness, and passed away.

These were very pleasant days to Berry. It seemed as though her heart was waking out of the cold and dark of the dreadful winter that was gone, just as the birds were that had begun already to sing among the trees.

Hardy was kinder to her than ever; had insisted on her taking a vacant place at one of the looms in the cotton mills, which allowed her every other afternoon at home. The wages were a trifle diminished, it is true, and a trifle was a great matter to Hardy and Berry Shumway, but he had said, when she had spoken of that, in his kindest way, "Never mind, little sister; you kept the soul and body of us both together last spring, and it's only fair I should do as much for you now."

Berry is very busy, as I said, this afternoon, knitting a muffler of clouded gray and white wools. Every little while she stops to inspect it, setting her head critically on one side and then on the other, and patting her work approvingly, for there is some inborn skill in those brown, wiry fingers. Whatever they set themselves to do they will do well.

Berry is putting her heart into every stitch which she sets in that work. She has been carefully scraping together her little factory earnings to buy the wools, not asking Hardy for a sixpence, because he needed all his wages to pull him out of the debts he had incurred that winter; but this present is for Dr. Avery.

"It will be just the thing he needs when he is off riding nights," Berry says to her brother; and then she thinks to herself that "the doctor will value the gift just as much, coming from her, — little Berry Shumway, — as though the proudest lady in the land had made it for him. If people are poor and humble, he does not think the less of them, Dr. Avery doesn't, if they have true, good, honest hearts — she knows."

So Berry's thoughts go to herself. In the midst of them Hardy shoves open the door and comes in from his day's work. Berry purses up her mouth, and there is a little tartness in her tone as she bids him good-evening, much like a mother to a boy who has infringed, in a small way, some of her rules.

Hardy goes as usual to the mantel and fills his pipe, for it is a full hour yet to supper-time.

Then Berry speaks: "Hardy, I've learned all about it from Jane Coyle;" the tartness very salient in her tones now.

"Heard all about what?" twisting a bit of brown paper into a wisp.

"About the grand folks at Tuxbury goin' all through the factory, and how they all stopped and said a good many nice things to somebody I know. Lake Coyle, who stood near, thought it was all worth tellin' to his sister, and she *was* beat this mornin' when she found I'd never heard a lisp of it."

Hardy had lighted his pipe by this time; he threw down the flaming paper and set his foot on it.

"There wasn't much to tell," he said, making a very poor effort at self-defence.

"Not much to tell!" repeated Berry, putting down her work and looking at him with a face that said unutterable things. "Hardy, I could box your ears, I declare I could!"

"Twouldn't pay this time, I guess, Berry," trying clumsily to turn the matter off with a jest.

"Hardy Shumway!" the little, swift tongue loosened and going energetically enough now. "To think such a thing could have happened, and you kept still for three whole days about it, when you knew I should be just crazy to hear! What has got into you?"

Hardy settled his big limbs in the chair with a wonderfully submissive air, considering who the small creature was that took him to task so peremptorily; yet there was some trouble in his face which the circumstances hardly seemed to call for.

"Hardy," in the tones of one who was resolute on coming at the truth now, "what was the reason you did not tell me?"

"I was willing enough to do it, Berry; but somehow, when the time come, I couldn't set about it."

The something in his voice that haunted his face: a kind of smothered pain. His back was toward Berry, but she felt the voice.

It softened the girl at once, for, despite all the happiness of these later days, she was not just at ease about Hardy. He seemed a great deal more like himself, now he had got to work once more; yet there was a vague, impalpable something about him which baffled her when she set her wits to thinking about it, — wits not easily baffled either. She never recalled his look on that morning when she left him at the factory door without a shudder, and she had a kind of half-motherly anxiety about the big, stolid fellow all the time; a kind of doubt lest he had not quite recovered from the shock and long anguish of last winter; and she had an unacknowledged feeling, too, that Hardy had never depended on her quite so much as at this time.

"Well, Hardy," in a half-encouraging, half-patronizing tone, "I won't say any more about it; only I want to hear the whole now."

After a preliminary whiff or two at his pipe: "You know all I can tell already."

"Ah, Hardy, come now, don't get off that way," with another burst of impatience in her voice; and then, reflecting that men never could be expected to talk like girls and women, Berry came to the rescue in consideration of the incapacity of his sex: —

"There were four of them, Hardy?"

"That was all."

"Mr. Whitmarsh, and the beautiful lady that saved his life, and his sister-in-law, and Dr. Avery."

"You've got em' all down," replied Hardy, as though he would like to drop the subject. Berry had, however, not the faintest intention of letting him off so easily.

"And the young gentleman is getting on wonderfully, they say. He looks thin and pale yet, but he'll be just as sound as he was before that dreadful thing happened. What a mercy!"

"Yes," said Hardy, briskly, and a sudden pleasure shone in his light eyes. "He'll be jest as well as though that had never happened to him."

"And, Hardy, what made you so stunned-like at first when Mr. Whitmarsh spoke to you so kindly? — when he's proved himself such a great friend, too; the least you could do was to thank him."

"Don't talk about it, Berry. I hadn't any words to say. I couldn't help it," his voice thick and rapid, his feet moving uneasily.

"But you did find something to say at last, — to the young lady, I mean," a little archly.

When it came to talking of Miss Carruthers, it seemed quite another matter with Hardy. He went over all that had passed between himself and the young lady with a minuteness and animation in strong contrast with his manner at first, while Berry hung upon every word; and he also repeated Dr. Avery's speech, which set the girl's face on fire with delighted blushes.

When he was through with it all, Berry came over to her brother, her cheeks all in a glow, and she laid her hands on his shoulder: "I think that young Whitmarsh understood all you felt, Hardy, and that what you said was just as good as a great many thanks."

"I couldn't talk to him — I couldn't," said Hardy, in that smothered, rapid way again, as though something hurt him.

Berry thought the sight of young Whitmarsh brought back all the old misery of that time when her brother had been turned out of the Mills and the dreadful days that followed.

Hardy was a silent, brooding fellow, Berry reflected, "but troubles went deep with him," and stayed there. She went on talking of Miss Carruthers.

"Don't you think she has a beautiful face, Hardy? Just the face of a woman who would do what she did that night!"

His own brightened all over again. He described Miss Carruthers' face in a way that was quite wonderful, considering Hardy had only seen it once in his life, lingering on every lineament and expression, almost as though the stolid workman were some artist dwelling on the face that he had worshipped and wrought out slowly in all its perfection of color and outline upon his canvas.

"It looks wonderfully beautiful to me, that woman's face. In all the world one will never look like that," speaking solemnly, almost under his breath.

"It can't seem any more beautiful to you than it does to me, Hardy," replied Berry, positively. "I know just how she looked when she smiled at you."

"No, Berry; she may be beautiful in your eyes, but that woman will never look to anybody else just as she does to me."

Berry glanced up in surprise. There was Hardy, with his big jaws and his heavy, solemn face. She would have her joke over it, though, for Berry's native spirits were always given to overflowing in little, bright sparkles of jests that only needed culture and pruning to make them keen and witty shafts in elegant society.

"I guess, Hardy Shumway, if Miss Carruthers had a lover, he would think it was mighty funny to hear you go on in that way."

"Maybe," he said, but the heavy jaws did not relax into any smile. Berry could not divine what was at work under the broad, reddish face.

She fell into serious thought for a few moments, "Hardy was so odd," while her brother puffed at his pipe. Of a sudden Berry broke out again: "Don't you think, Hardy, it's very funny they've never got any clue to them murderers?"

Hardy winced and shuffled his feet unsteadily. "I haven't thought much about it of late," he said.

"Well, I have; Jane Coyle says they've pretty much given up the search around here, thinkin' the wretches must have come from a distance, it was so coolly planned and carried out."

Hardy gave a grunt and sat still at his pipe.

"Phew! that awful tobacco! How I hate it!" cried Berry, with a sniff of disgust.

"Well, I forgot, child; I'll go out-doors and finish up this pipe."

But Hardy said this with a kind of weary hopelessness that touched her again: "No you won't, either," holding him back with one hand on his knee. "Never mind me, Hardy; I can stand it."

Another little silence betwixt the two, and then the girl returned to the old subject: "Do you know, Hardy, if I had to pick out the man among all the men I ever saw, as most likely to do that dreadful deed, who it would be?"

Hardy took his pipe from his mouth; his hand shook. "No, I'm sure I don't know," he said, and each word seemed to drop like a weight of lead from his lips.

"It was that Blatchley, horrid old thing! His face looked just bad enough for some awful wickedness. It's funny the way it came across me the other day; but who knows now but what it was really him?"

Hardy's pipe dropped to pieces on the floor. His lips turned livid, and a little, sharp, suppressed moan broke through them.

Berry looked up, and was on her feet in an instant: "Why, Hardy, what is the matter?"

"Nothing; I don't know, child," dragging his hand across his forehead.

"Are you sick, Hardy? Can't I do something for you?"

"No, only — What was you a-sayin' jest ago, Berry?"

"Oh, nothin', only some foolish talk of mine about old Blatchley's bein' the man who tried to murder young Whitmarsh. You didn't mind that, Hardy?"

"It's an awful thing to say about any man, — I tell you it is, Berry," grasping her arm and speaking in a rapid, hoarse voice, with some terror in his eyes that fairly set their dulness all ablaze. "It might bring dreadful trouble."

"But I shan't say anything about it. Of course I didn't really mean I thought old Blatchley had anything to do with the matter; and I should feel it was wicked to say a man was a murderer, because he had a bad face. He might be innocent, for all that."

"Yes, he might, and — You're sure, Berry, you haven't said anything to anybody, — not a lisp?"

"I'm sure as I stand here, Hardy Shumway, I haven't said one word to a livin' soul, and never shall; only you needn't feel cut up about it; he wasn't really any friend o' yourn anyhow; you'd only seen him a few times."

"Not many times," the strained, shocked look in his eyes still. "But, Berry, even if it was true, which of course I don't mean, yet Blatchley might have friends that loved and believed in him, — a mother, or a little sister, like you now."

"Oh, I never thought of that," her voice startled at first. "But then it never could be if he was a murderer. They'd be sure to find it out."

"They mightn't; such things have happened;" his eyes dropped away from hers, his voice hoarse in his throat.

"Don't talk about such dreadful things, Hardy. I'm sure they never entered my mind when I've gone on so about them murderers. But I don't believe they ever had any friends. If they had, and they ever knew, it would strike them dead at one blow."

The man looked up at the girl now: "Yes, I think it would kill you, Berry," speaking in a kind of slow, dazed way.

"What in the world are you and I talking about such things for, Hardy Shumway?" said Berry, standing up and shaking off a kind of black nightmare which seemed to have dropped stifling upon her. "Why, it's as bad as telling over ghost stories."

"That's a fact!" answered Hardy, much like a man preoccupied, and not exactly aware of what he was saying.

Berry went to the cupboard, hunted up another pipe, and set that and his little tin box of tobacco before her brother, her care or pity always taking some form of practical helpfulness, you see; nothing unsound or morbid in her temperament.

"Now, Hardy, you just comfort yourself with that, and I'll set about getting tea. I mean to give you a real treat to-night, poor old fellow!" patting the big head much as she would a dog's.

She had her times of standing in fear of Hardy, but this was not one of them.

So she pattered busily back and forth, humming tunes sometimes to herself, while the man sat still and puffed at his pipe, and the shocked look gradually wore out of his eyes.

At last Berry came and said, with a good deal of an air, "Now, Mr. Shumway, your supper is all ready."

He went out, and sure enough there were fresh biscuit and nice coffee, and a little dish of smoking perch, which Hardy was so fond of, — a clean, tempting table for a poor, hungry workman.

He looked pleased enough to satisfy Berry as he sat down to it. She had done what she could; but, after all, no kindly words, no skill, nor care of the warm, helpful little heart and hands could go down where the hurt lay deep and vital in the soul of Hardy Shumway.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHANGE had come suddenly over Marjorie Carruthers. Mrs. Whitmarsh dated it from the afternoon of their visit to the Mills, and recalled every occurrence of that time, vainly seeking to dive to the occult cause of the transition in her cousin's manner.

It had entered on quite another phase: all that charm and softness which had marked her during the convalescence of Benjamin Whitmarsh had disappeared now. She was the proud, restless, uncertain Marjorie Carruthers of old, liable to sudden heats of temper, her moods exacting or haughty or frigid; and, worse than all the rest, her irony spared nobody; it cut smooth and sharp as a scythe; it struck bright and swift as lightning. Poor Mrs. Whitmarsh was sometimes for the moment quite wilted beneath it; not that she cared for herself, — her love for Marjorie struck its roots down in great central depths, where no tumult of the girl's stormy nature could shake them, — but she was on nettles for the sake of others. John Whitmarsh was a man, with opinions of his own, and Miss Carruthers did not spare him a sudden slash of her sarcasm now and then; in fact, his wife was perfectly conscious that he bore from that young woman's tempers and moods what he would from no other human being, mindful always of the great desolation of heart and household from which she had saved him; still, his gratitude could not wholly neutralize the impression which Marjorie's conduct began to make on him.

And then it was very hard for Eleanor to have that pretty cabinet of domestic pictures, with her brother-in-law and her cousin the central figures, all swept into chaos. It would take a bolder man than Benedick to attempt to tame such a Beatrice, for it did seem as though these days Miss Carruthers was bent upon treating young Whitmarsh a little worse than she did anybody else. She was always quarrelling with him now; always challenging his opinions of authors, of people, of countries; cutting in amongst his talk with the sharp, glittering edge of her irony. It appeared to Mrs. Whitmarsh that the creature was set upon making herself absolutely dreaded and hateful; yet the latter it was not in the power of Marjorie Carruthers to be. Her cousin was not assured that she had ever been quite so brilliant and fascinating as at this very time. For some reason all her faculties seemed alive and aglow. How her wit did sparkle! What a glitter there was in her sarcasm!

Whether it was the memory of what she had done for him one night, or whether these moods and tempers only stimulated and amused him, his sister-in-law could not tell; but, although she often sat trembling, Ben never seemed offended, as he had a perfect right to be; nay, more, he seemed to enjoy whatever side of herself Miss Carruthers condescended to turn toward him. Not that he proved himself unequal to a contest with that young lady's wits; a woman might have saved his life, — and that must hedge her around with an eternal sacredness in his thought and feeling, — but that was no reason why Benjamin Whitmarsh should tamely submit to what was as nearly tantalizing indifference and sneers and insults, as a well-bred woman's talk and tones and manner could possibly be. Ben Whitmarsh would ride bravely into the lists at Miss Carruthers' challenge, and the encounter, although it used to hold the young hostess trembling and breathless, was like some grand fencing-match, between the fine cultivated wits of this man and woman.

Ben Whitmarsh was no light antagonist. He often, his sister-in-law thought, turned her cousin's weapons with wonderful power and grace upon herself; and though he never forgot that he was a man and she a woman, or the courtesy that "doublet owed to petticoat," still, on her own ground, Miss Carruthers was very often pretty thoroughly worsted, which Eleanor keenly enjoyed, for she was sometimes as provoked as possible with Marjorie's behavior, and heartily wished that she was no bigger than her own boy, so that she could give her "a thorough spanking."

But if Marjorie was bent on making herself disagreeable, she forgot it sometimes, and then that wonderfully sweet, childlike side of her would shine out suddenly, like some May morning's bloom and fragrance, leaning out of stormy gusts of wind and rain. Smiles would come into her face, and possess it with their own marvel of sweetness; her talk, whether grave or gay, would have its own seductive charm; and one would never dream that the girl, sitting there in her soft loveliness, could chill suddenly into frost or kindle into fire. Mrs. Whitmarsh, looking at her cousin, would wonder to herself: "You are sweet above all living women, Marjorie Carruthers. Alas! why are you also the strangest?"

More than once Mr. Whitmarsh said to his wife, "Eleanor, what has got into your cousin? She is the most unaccountable being I ever saw. Why, her tongue and her temper are terrific things, and we all seem to take our turn in falling victims to them."

"Ah, John, you don't understand Marjorie," always standing promptly and bravely on the defensive where her cousin was concerned. "I know she is a high-strung creature; but I never mind her crotchets, any more than I do baby's tantrums. A great deal of her moods come, just now, from her overstrung nerves. They had a dreadful strain one night not long ago."

That allusion was always certain to leave Mrs. Whitmarsh in entire possession of the field, when the character or conduct of Marjorie was the subject of discussion betwixt Eleanor and her husband.

"No doubt they did, my dear. It certainly does not become me, of all men, to criticise your cousin. If she had been a woman of the ordinary, commonplace type, she could never have strung herself up to facing that night's work. Poor thing! we ought to bear patiently with any amount of her moods." But the man could not help thinking to himself that, though the woman capable of a great heroism was necessary for emergencies, yet the gentler, less eccentric type, like his sweet little Eleanor, for example, was, to say the least, much more comfortable to live with.

As for his younger brother, he was in love with Marjorie Carruthers. I use the words now in their deepest, holiest sense, not in the superficial, society one.

This woman had entered into his inmost heart; yet, lover as he was, the man was not blind to her faults, and nothing escaped him of the change in Miss Carruthers' manners toward everybody in general, himself in particular.

It puzzled him quite as much as it did his pretty sister-in-law; but, whatever her mood was, Marjorie Carruthers always roused and fascinated Benjamin Whitmarsh.

Down deep under all the dazzle of her wit, or the sword-like glitter of her irony, throbbed a woman's heart, loyal and tender. Young Whitmarsh felt that, and he could no more help the outflow of his affections toward Miss Carruthers than the tides can help returning when the hour strikes, and swinging over the shores in vast strength and splendor. It was true this feeling did not prevent him from meeting Marjorie on her own ground. He was not one of the drawing-room type of lovers, hanging in fascinated adoration on a woman's face and talk. There was too much muscular individuality in the man for any stuff of that sort. Indeed, some of Marjorie's moods always acted on him as the sound of the trumpet on the war-horse, — roused all his latent fire and forces to meet her, to brave her pride, her irony, her scorn — in some sense to master them.

But would he ever be able to conquer this strange, dazzling, beautiful, high-mettled creature, — this woman at war with herself, yet with the heart in her somewhere so true, and precious, and tender, and womanly?

Every day Ben Whitmarsh loved her a little better than before; and when Miss Carruthers was particularly aggravating and disagreeable, he would say to himself, as a lover only could, "Ah, Marjorie, beautiful and cold as snow upon distant mountain heights, or as white, still lilies in the hearts of summer water-courses, it would be a mean, shallow love enough that could not forgive the storms and moods of the fine, grand, generous nature. At least, I am not so mean that they can ever move me, O darling, that yet I may never call mine!"

To tell the honest truth, too, Marjorie was often ashamed of herself when she got away to her own room and reflected on her behavior downstairs; for, although she was a lady essentially, and could never transcend the bounds of good-breeding, yet one may be insufferably tantalizing and aggravating within those limits. But Miss Carruthers did not command herself these days. Some trouble and tumult seemed to possess her. It filled her with a vague dread, tormented her with something which she could not or would not face, and through all, goading and stinging her, seemed ever to rumble in perpetual monotone the foolish talk of the workmen that afternoon at the Mill.

All this time the spring was deepening among the hills and valleys of Tuxbury, — the fresh, tender, delicious green stealing over the moist earth and covering it with a garment of beauty. There was a singing of birds in the morning, a thrill of sprouting leaves among the branches, and soft, delicious, sunny afternoons of the early May.

As for keeping in doors, it was impossible. Benjamin Whitmarsh had always been nomadic in his habits, and his health was by this time quite beyond the necessity of any anxiety on the part of others. There were daily boatings, and drives, and excursions of all sorts, in which Miss Carruthers joined, whenever she could be coaxed or cajoled into doing this, — a drive, a walk, or a sail being sure to put her into a radiant humor.

She had been delicate as a child, was that indeed now, and always would be. But on that very account her uncle had her thoroughly trained in various out-door exercises and accomplishments, not, unfortunately, deemed a necessary part of a girl's education. She could row a boat or manage a high-mettled horse, and had a passionate fondness for things of that sort. And it came to pass that, as there was always some excursion going on which took the family out-doors in the delicious spring weather, young Whitmarsh and Miss Carruthers were still constantly thrown together.

The girl, it is true, made desperate efforts to keep in the house, and not join Eleanor and Ben in their rambles, and once or twice she carried her point; but the spring, with its sprouting grasses and singing of birds, with all its delicious thrills of air and sap and sunbeams, proved too much for the will and pride of Marjorie Carruthers. She loved all these as a child does, as the very bob-o'-links did, darting in and out among the opening of the blossoms, and the hungry craving of her soul drove her out with the others; and there nature took the girl straight into her strong, warm heart, and stilled and gladdened her like the tender hushes of a mother; and then how sweet, and bright, and playful, how altogether lovely Miss Carruthers could be, her cousin out of the fulness of her heart, or Ben Whitmarsh out of his, might be able to tell you.

One day, returning at noon to dinner, the gentleman found the ladies out on the veranda, the baby in a perpetual migration betwixt his mother and "Aunt Madge," whose name he had just begun to take daintily betwixt his year-and-a-half lips, red as strawberries with the dew on them. What a day that was, leaning down with blue, dreamy eyes to gaze into the golden face of June! The gentlemen took off their hats, and Marjorie's smile came out at its sweetest, and with Eleanor, welcomed them home.

"What have you two knight-errants been about today?" asked the latter, laying down the book she had been reading to Miss Carruthers.

"My knight-errantry has been of the most prosaic kind, — still at the old mountain, watching the digging and drilling and blasting. There is no romance in these days for you women; no knights with plumes and case-armor, and war-horses to clatter over drawbridges and deliver you from lonely castles and high turrets where you are held unwilling captives; no lists, nor tournaments, nor ladies' favors, nor falcons for small white wrists; no pouring out to the chase on summer mornings with hound and hawk and handsome page, with waving of plumes and blowing of trumpets. It is a bare, coarse, practical age enough, — hey, my Cousin Marjorie?"

Once in a great while, since she had done that deed to his brother, John Whitmarsh called the girl by that name. It meant a great deal with him.

He never either talked in just this way, with anybody but Miss Carruthers; a good-humored satire through all, for he fancied that young woman slightly romantic, and that her style and habits of thought were somewhat better fitted to the sixteenth than the nineteenth century.

Marjorie looked up, her face shaken with feeling; "Ah, Cousin John," — it was the first time she had ever called him this, — "you talk like my uncle now."

Very seldom it was that Marjorie alluded to her dead; but, to-day, sitting in the sunshine, the very air about her all astir with the soft spring scent of blossoms, the glory of the coming summer upon the hills, old memories had been crowding upon the girl's heart. "A day like this makes me feel as though he were alive again, because he loved it so; he used to say, 'It puts the boy's heart back into me again, Marjorie, — the year's very sap into my veins.'"

Since she had been under his roof, Miss Carruthers had not spoken so much as this to her cousin's husband of her uncle. "The year's sap in your veins! The boy's heart! Ah!" — turning to his brother, — "ah, Ben, those were the very words you said to me as we came up the road together."

"You did?" turning her pleased, surprised eyes on the young man. "It has seemed as though I heard a voice through all Eleanor's reading, going over with those words of his;" and then it came suddenly upon her that she should never hear that dear voice again, as a quick, awful consciousness of the loss of our dead is borne in upon our souls at times. Her lips trembled. She could get no farther. The sight was almost more than Benjamin Whitmarsh could bear. It seemed suddenly to open depths of solitude and pain in the soul of the proud, beautiful woman before him. His love, too, gave him a fine insight into Marjorie's states of mind; and this day, bringing back vast freshets of sweet and tender memories to swing through her thoughts, gave to Miss Carruthers a mood of unusual, clinging softness. She remembered that her cousin Eleanor was her nearest kin on earth; and the people about her and the cottage at Tuxbury seemed a little more like home and household than they had ever done before.

"It is curious," answered young Whitmarsh, "to find how one man's experience answers to another's. It has seemed all this morning as though the very blood of my boyhood was a-tingle in my veins once more. In fact, I've been out among the woods trying my lungs in shouting and my strength in turning summersaults, — with a feeling, too, that I ought to be setting traps for squirrels and peering into birds' nests."

"Oh, dear!" laughed Mrs. Whitmarsh, gayly, "what wild animals boys are by nature! I dread the time when mine takes to his savage phase," looking at the white, dimpled bit of humanity that was playing and crowing over some colored balls at her feet.

"I move, for this one afternoon, that we all turn into boys and girls, or, to repeat you, my dear," turning to his wife, "take to the savage phase," said Mr. Whitmarsh.

"O John, that will be delightful; but how shall we accomplish it?"

"Easily enough. Ben and I will drive you all around to Moose Lake, and we will take a sail when we get there; and I will leave mills and mountain and mines, for one blessed half day, to the moon."

"Ben, Marjorie, of course you will all go, and find the Alps in the rocks, and some charming morsel of Switzerland in our poor little green bowl of a lake?" said the lady, with her usual animation.

Nobody could raise an objection with that sky and air, and the project was all matured in a few moments; but in less than a quarter of an hour Ben Whitmarsh was humming poor Burns' ditty: —

> "The best-laid plans of mice and men
> Gang aft aglee,"

for a telegram had been brought to Mr. Whitmarsh, which shook down all their pretty gypsy programme in a twinkling.

Some relatives of Mrs. Whitmarsh, on a flying journey to Canada, had concluded to take Tuxbury in their route, stopping at the latter place for a day. They would reach the depot, six miles off, by the middle of the afternoon. Of course there was no help for it. The gentleman and lady must ride over to receive their friends, and, after a hurried dinner, the carriage was driven around to the door.

Just as they were on the point of starting, Mrs. Whitmarsh turned to her brother-in-law and her cousin, who had come to the door to see them off. "It is thoroughly aggravating," she said, with a dubious face. "Of course I shall be delighted to see these people; but if the Fates had only pushed their visit into to-morrow afternoon, we could have had our drive and sail also."

"As for me, you behold the most inconsolable of men," added Benjamin Whitmarsh; and there was a good deal more of truth than poetry in what he said, for what would such an afternoon even as that May one be, emptied of the light and color of Marjorie Carruthers' society?

"I am as heart-broken," added that young lady, "as a girl who was to be queen of the May, and wear a crown of flowers, and who opens her eyes in the morning to find all her pleasures buried up in a snow-storm."

"Just turn philosophers now, and make the most of your afternoon without us."

"Good luck to you!" said Mr. Whitmarsh; and he lifted his hat and drove off, leaving the man and woman standing by the gate together.

"You have heard what John said, Miss Carruthers?" turning to her. "Shall we take his advice?"

The girl drew a deep breath. That hankering for woods and fields, for all the great, varied life of nature, which was in the blood of Marjorie Carruthers, as it is in an Indian's or a gypsy's, in birds and animals, — a hankering which her previous education had developed and cultured, — was alive within her now.

Yet, of late, she had striven more or less to avoid young Whitmarsh; and she paused and half drew back at the idea of starting off all alone for an afternoon adventure with this young fellow; not so much as "baby" betwixt them, that "ball of dimpled, chubby sweetness," to quote one of her expressions, being just now deep in his noon nap in the cradle upstairs.

Benjamin Whitmarsh, watching the girl's face, saw the doubt in it, — the hunger, too. There were in him some forces of will, some strong personal magnetisms, which make the men or women who possess them a power for good or for evil among their kind.

"Miss Carruthers, I see plainly you are at a loss for any good reason why you should stay at home. It is not I, but the afternoon commands you. Go and get ready."

She looked up in his face, half surprised, half curious. It was a face that never repelled the fine instincts of man or woman. "I believe I will go, Mr. Whitmarsh," said Marjorie Carruthers, with a smile clearing up the doubt in her eyes.

Afterward there was a little talk as to the direction of their ramble, the matter soon settling itself into a walk to a gorge among the hills, some three miles off, the road steep and hilly for a drive, but lonely, wild, and picturesque to the last degree.

In a few minutes Miss Carruthers came downstairs in a simple, becoming costume of browns and greens, which her uncle used to declare made her look like a wood-naiad; but Benjamin Whitmarsh thought of pictures and statues of Greek goddesses, and stuff of that sort, as the lady met him on the veranda.

The walk which followed was, I suppose, to this man and woman something which it could be to very few people in the world. You must remember, in the first place, just what they were with their singularly rich sympathies for all the moods of Nature, for all the glories of her color, the grandeur of her forms.

You must bear in mind, too, the afternoon, — the soft, golden air pervaded with moist, sprouting, blossomy scents of the May, the radiant exultation of that life which had raised the Year once more out of her winter of death, and clothed her in green garments, with the song of waters and the singing of birds.

There was rough climbing over the rocks and broken roads, but it only brought a more vivid glow of enjoyment into Miss Carruthers' face, as the two laughed and jested; and memories of Wales and of days on the Rhine and in the valleys of Switzerland crowded back upon them; and they told stories, or repeated fragments of rhymes, or lapsed into happy silences that brimmed over the hours of that afternoon.

They reached at last the gorge in the hills, — one of those spots which has been waiting for its artists since the dawn of creation. The gloom of the shadows, the masses of color, the cool, delicious stillness, through which shivered occasionally the breath of the wind among the pines, or the shout of the water as it flashed over the bald, steep rock and dropped, a white, shining heap, into the stream below, the glimpses of golden light on the broad slopes of meadows far beneath, were, to quote Marjorie Carruthers' enthusiastic encomium, "worth climbing three hundred miles, instead of three, to behold."

The two drank it in to the full, sitting there under the cool shadows, in the green silences, for at least a couple of hours. That whole afternoon would come back to their memories long afterward, like a vision seen in a dream, with something of the bright, misty indistinctness of a dream too.

But something finished up the afternoon at last with sharp, hard lines enough. It happened on their return home, and when they were within less than a mile of the house.

The road had been torn and gullied with spring rains, and they had had a scrambling time of it, for some distance, leaping across ruts and ditches; and more than once Miss Carruthers had required the aid of both young Whitmarsh's hands in springing from one point to another.

That it was what a boy would call "real fun" to her, nobody could doubt who heard the clear, happy ring of her laugh over each vanquished difficulty.

It was precisely at the wrong moment, however, that a squad of workmen, going home from their day's toil at the tunnelling, came upon the young man and woman.

The two had come on a gully a little broader than any they had yet crossed, and Marjorie was surveying the gap rather dubiously, when her cavalier, in his prompt fashion, solved the problem by taking the young woman in his arms and setting her down on the other side, a good deal flushed, amused, and excited.

The squad of workmen, — not more than a dozen in all, — turning suddenly into the road, witnessed the act.

There were reasons enough why the grimed, stolid faces should stare with a good-natured curiosity at the two. Marjorie Carruthers drew herself up haughtily as an insulted queen while the heavy, slouching figures passed by.

The talk at the Mill rushed back on Miss Carruthers like an ugly blast of east wind. She listened nervously conscious, lest something of the kind should be renewed now; and, alas! she did not have to wait long.

"That chap seems comin' up to the scratch like a real lover, as he ought to. Didn't I tell you, Pete?" and a hoarse laugh followed this coarse attempt at wit, and it rasped and grated across the strung nerves of Marjorie Carruthers.

The man, walking by her side, had not overheard one word of all this. The typical lover is, you know, a proverbially absent creature; and though young Whitmarsh usually had eyes and ears for whatsoever was going on about him, the talk of the hands at this juncture had quite escaped him.

But he did observe the change which came suddenly upon Miss Carruthers; he was acquainted by this time with her morbid sensitiveness of temperament, and though he regarded it as a weakness, — for he by no means thought the young lady of his love faultless, — still he could have forgiven far greater blemishes than this in Marjorie Carruthers.

"You are annoyed by the rudeness of those men," seeing the sudden gloom in her face. "But you must remember the curiosity has its rise in a feeling which does them credit. One night made you a heroine forever, even in the eyes of those coarse workmen, Miss Carruthers."

Marjorie did not stop to weigh these words. She was all alive and quivering with a sense of insult. Had it been otherwise, she would have perceived from his speech that young Whitmarsh had not overheard the workmen. But her pride on fire, with a blind, desperate impulse to answer the thought she fancied at work with her companion, Marjorie replied, drawing herself up frigidly enough to collapse an ordinary mortal: "I suppose they have not sense enough to suspect that I did for you, Mr. Whitmarsh, precisely what I should for any wilted dog who happened to be laid before me in just your plight; but I did not anticipate that I should, in consequence, have the honor henceforward to be a public curiosity, and be gaped at by clowns and clodhoppers, every time I showed my face outside the house."

Young Whitmarsh was for the moment confounded by this speech, — one that was simply insolent, heartless, cruel for any woman to make, under the circumstances; and Marjorie's irony had never condescended to be all these before.

In a moment, however, the man recovered himself, and his reply at once disarmed Miss Carruthers, showed her the essential hardness and meanness of her remark, and put that young woman to shame, as she thoroughly deserved to be.

"But even the fact that you regretted your own act, Miss Carruthers, finding its consequences so unpleasant, could not make the dog unmindful that he once owed his life to you, nor obliterate the grateful sense with which he must always remember a deed that would forever leave him your debtor."

Ben Whitmarsh had his revenge at that moment, Marjorie thought, — all the finer because he had not forgotten that he was a gentleman, even under so strong a temptation as she had offered him.

What if she had been too hasty, after all, and he had not overheard one word of that absurd talk which had so maddened her? She walked on silently by the man's side, in a tumult of mortification and remorse, until the houses came in sight. Then Marjorie, with a last struggle, turned suddenly to young Whitmarsh: —

"Can you forgive me for what I said to you, Mr.

Whitmarsh? I shall not blame you if you refuse, for it seems to me unpardonable. But you cannot think worse of the words than I do now of their insolence and cruelty. Some talk of those men, which I think you did not hear, drove me quite furious for the moment."

"No, I did not hear it. But, if you speak of forgiveness, — although that seems hardly a fitting word between you and me, Miss Carruthers, — I had done that before you asked me."

"I did not deserve it;" and she gave him both her hands now, just as, I verily believe, only Marjorie Carruthers could do that thing: "You are very generous, Mr. Whitmarsh."

"Generous to you —" He broke off there with a great effort, thinking to himself, "If you add another word now, you will make an egregious fool of yourself, Ben."

Marjorie misinterpreted his words, fancying he meant that he could never be generous to her because of the debt betwixt them.

Half an hour later, in her own room, she said to herself, "Marjorie Carruthers, what a goose you have been making of yourself all this time! Benjamin Whitmarsh has no more notion of proposing to you than has the man in the moon! You've kept yourself miserable, and insulted everybody around you, over the foolish gossip of a few poor, coarse, ignorant workmen; and, worst of all, you've made a rude, brutal, cruel speech, — you, who pride yourself on your grace and delicacy and good-breeding! If the man himself, whom you wantonly insulted, was generous enough to pardon you, you ought to despise yourself for the rest of your days."

Miss Carruthers did not spare herself. At the core of her the girl loved truth, and her self-humiliation was honest, and so far wholesome that it made a softer, sweeter woman of her for the weeks that followed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THOSE weeks brought the family at Tuxbury down into the heart of the summer. It was a happy time for all of them. Things went on with such wonderful smoothness now betwixt her brother-in-law and her cousin that the head of Mrs. Whitmarsh was filled once more with its cabinet of pretty, domestic pictures.

If that high-mettled Marjorie could ever be tamed, ever be won and wedded and gathered into the cherishing and sweetness of home and love, Ben Whitmarsh was the man to accomplish it, reasoned that gentleman's sister-in-law.

And then, despite her moods and tempers and faults, what large forces of tenderness and devotion were in the girl! What a wife she would make for the man whom she loved, and who, out of his own great tenderness, could understand and have a large patience with her!

Then Ben and Marjorie were so wonderfully suited to each other in taste, temperament, character! It would be entirely different with that dear, noble John. He was ten times better suited with his "little singing thrush of an Eleanor," as he called her, "who could nestle right down in the soft, warm side of his heart, and not mind any of the angles and prejudices, than he could be with that magnificent Miss Carruthers."

But it was different with Ben. He would want a woman of a different sort, — a woman with a wide circle of thought, feeling, culture, with swift insight into, and large sympathies with, his moods and tastes and studies.

Every man after his own kind. Now, Mrs. Whitmarsh firmly believed in marriage, — thought the man or the woman who missed this, missed the deepest joy of life; still, she knew Ben and Marjorie well enough to know that with them marriage must be that, or else the keenest misery, the heaviest anguish, which time could bring them.

But the lady kept her own counsel, on the keen watch all the while for those straws that indicate in which quarter the wind sets.

The household was full of life and bustle these days; picnics, sails, drives, horseback rides and rambles making the foreground. They half-lived out-doors, these people, among their picturesque landscapes, during the delicious summer weather. Marjorie Carruthers used to affirm that they might as well thoroughly break with civilization and go off into a gypsy encampment at once, for their attempts to combine a nomad with a settled life would always miscarry. Individuals, like races, must either be savage or civilized.

Some secret antagonism with herself, which had made Marjorie so moody and inflammable, was at rest now. The summer seemed to have entered into her just as it had into the birds and the flowers. She was the life and color of the household in doors and out.

Young Whitmarsh and she were together now half the time; their talk, their jests, their whole intimacy acting like a fine stimulant, each upon the thought and mind of the other. Of course, they disagreed often, but, however firmly Marjorie might hold her ground against argument or authority, however her wit might dazzle or her humor play like summer lightning around their discussions, her irony never slashed, her heats of temper never blazed up in sudden fire.

Miss Carruthers had told herself that she and Ben Whitmarsh were friends. They had a right to be, certainly. As for lovers, that, of course, was out of the question, to be left to the talk, certainly, of ignorant work-hands, who could have no possible idea of the relations which might exist betwixt a cultivated man and woman having many tastes and sympathies in common. She would never degrade the man nor herself by the suspicion that he would ask any woman to be his wife because of any debt of gratitude, real or fancied, that he owed her.

So Marjorie settled the matter in her own thoughts, and gave herself to the full enjoyment of what the summer had to offer her, including the society of Ben Whitmarsh. One thing was certain, — she was happier than she ever expected to be after that awful grief of three years ago.

All this time there was more or less company at Tuxbury. Friends of the family, on their journey to the White Mountains, the Canadas, the Adirondacks, turned aside for a few days to the charming retreat at

Tuxbury; so the household did not lack for any element of outside life, if they had required that.

As for young Whitmarsh, if he was each day a little more in love than the last, who can blame him?

Just think what this Marjorie Carruthers was, with her beauty, her grace, and, what was more than these, the wonderful, subtle magnetism of her presence. We all know faces attractive, even beautiful on first sight, which grow insipid, if nothing worse, on farther knowledge, and homely faces which grow interesting and lovely with intimacy.

Marjorie Carruthers' beauty was not her chiefest power. This last lay in eternal forces of her soul, and, remembering this, you can have some idea what it was to live in her charmed atmosphere as Benjamin Whitmarsh did; yet the man's will held, all this time, the mastery over his affections. He never, by word or sign, gave Marjorie to suspect that she was more to him than his friend, — the woman who had saved his life and this was the secret of her manner toward him, otherwise he would never have known her so well; he could never have drawn her so close to him in their free home intimacy.

Yet, for all this, it was hard on the fellow, — so hard that he was often half tempted to learn his fate and put all at stake by asking Miss Carruthers to be his wife.

"If she refused him, well, let the worst come;" setting his jaws together, and a horizon of his future, like bare, sandy, lonesome reaches of desert, opening suddenly before him; "it would not kill him: he was a man, and would not die for the love of a woman, who, whether she meant it or not, would after all have dragged him back to life, only to thrust it at last, shrivelled, worthless, back in his hands."

The younger brother was always making a jest of his returning to business; but, when it came to sober earnest, the elder tabooed the matter for the present.

There were the grounds, he said, sufficient to keep even Ben out of mischief for one summer. The boy must get sound on his feet again before there was any further talk of business, and in the autumn they two would take a week's hunting and fishing among the Adirondacks.

"The grounds" formed a principal feature in the Tuxbury life that summer. There were walks and drives to be laid out, terraces to be built, mounds to be raised, shrubberries to be set out, all of which was left in a general way to the supervision of young Whitmarsh and the ladies, the head of the household having, at this juncture, as great a business pressure as he could well carry. Eleanor and Marjorie were devoted to the flower-beds, and here Ben Whitmarsh proved a valuable auxiliary. Whether it was working with garden-hoe or rake out-doors, or inside reading poetry and discussing art and ethnology, or other equally recondite matters of æsthetics or ethics, the young man and woman were constantly thrown in each other's society.

There came an evening, however, when Miss Carruthers was left alone with only the baby and the servants in the house at Tuxbury. She enjoyed it; she had her moods for solitude, and there had been an unusual descent of guests during the last week, — "commonplace, conventional people, whose platitudes half wearied, half irritated her."

Mr. and Mrs. Whitmarsh had gone over to the next town to dine with some friends, and their brother had left that morning, just after breakfast, for the North, on some business.

It was a beautiful evening, rounding out a day luscious with the heats of midsummer; through the still air an occasional flutter of cool winds; overhead a full summer moon, lonely and bright and mournful in the midst of her splendor of stars. Marjorie went out on the veranda and walked up and down in the stillness, enjoying the night that seemed to have fallen into a trance over its own beauty. It was a long, long time since she had walked the veranda like this in the evening, — so long ago that it seemed she had lived an age since that event. The whole time came back on her now: the wild, solemn gloom of the evening, the black muster of clouds overhead, the howl of the winds up the valleys; and she shivered a little through all the moist heat of that midsummer night, as the raw chill of the winter evening seemed to creep along her veins once more.

Everything comes back to the girl now with a wonderful distinctness. She looks up the road, half expecting to see through the gathering mists the group of figures and the black, covered burden; the lights seem to move to and fro again, and her heart stands still; and the men are at the gate once more, and the torches are flaring red on their white, shocked faces. Marjorie shudders and wrings her hands, for the whole scene, in all its awful, vivid life, and her own part in it, crowd back on her now.

She gazes up and down the road, full of the gladness of the leaves and the white rapture of the moonlight; but that old memory has taken such power of her soul that the stillness and the shining half fail to soothe her.

She remembers with a start that Ben Whitmarsh is absent to-night; it is true he does not travel without weapons now; moreover, one or two of the foremen accompanied him on his trip; yet, for all this, she feels uneasy; it would be a great relief to her if she could hear the tramp of his horse's feet up the still, moonlit road.

All the actors, too, in that terrible drama come back to her now. Dr. Avery, with his broad, compact figure, his shrewd, kindly face, and his mellow, hearty voice, which puts fresh life into you. She has not seen the old man much of late, for he has been busy with his patients, and he is off now taking a breathing-spell up among the Canada woods and rivers.

Then her thoughts slip away to Berry Shumway's little, bright, honest face, and a smile comes into Marjorie's, remembering her first meeting with the factory-girl. What a little native burst of feeling that was!

By a very natural link of association, too, she recalls that brother of Berry's, — the young workman, the big, slouching figure, and the strange stare in the light blue eyes when they met hers that day at the Furnace.

Marjorie has meant to ride over to the settlement and hunt up the factory-girl; but the truth is, she has been so busy and so happy of late that she has not troubled herself about any of her plans. Into all these thoughts breaks suddenly the sound of horses' hoofs; in a moment the riders come in sight, three of them, — Ben Whitmarsh a little ahead of the others. They separate at the Furnace, and the young man dashes up the road and wheels round at the front gate. Marjorie, without a second thought, goes down to meet him, and he catches sight of her as he springs off his horse.

"O Mr. Whitmarsh, I am so glad you are safely back again!" says Marjorie, speaking the feeling which is uppermost in her heart, and not aware how earnestly she speaks it, either.

"Miss Carruthers, — what, are you alone here?" giving her his arm, and they go up the walk together.

"Yes; I persuaded John and Eleanor to ride over and dine with the Cornwalls. They have been invited to no purpose so often; and then, I do not dislike being alone sometimes."

"I understand that, Miss Carruthers. What a glorious night it is! One wishes it might last forever."

"Forever?" repeated Marjorie, half doubtfully. "The peace, the stillness, the splendor! I think you are right, Mr. Whitmarsh, — forever!"

"What have you been doing with the evening?" he asked.

"Walking up and down the veranda, and thinking —" She stopped there of a sudden.

"Thinking what?" he said.

"No; I had rather not tell you," she replied, in a swift, flurried way.

He looked up in her face; then it flashed on him in a moment. He had been told she was walking the veranda on that night, — like no other night in all of their lives, to him and to her. She had been living it all over in the stillness and solitude.

It shook his soul to know this, but he did not speak; he only kept her arm, and they walked up and down the veranda.

But Marjorie was as certain as though he had told her, that he knew where her thoughts had been. After a while the two began to talk about commonplace matters. Whitmarsh gave the lady some account of his trip that day, and also informed her that he should have to run down to New York for two or three days before the week was out.

The journey would devolve on him, as John could not be spared from Tuxbury for twenty-four hours until the tunnelling was over.

"It is quite too bad," said Miss Carruthers, in a voice of keen disappointment. "That long, tedious, dusty trip — in these midsummer heats, too; besides that, we shall not be able to get on at all without you."

Marjorie Carruthers was not precisely aware of her manner this evening. I think any lover would have taken some hope from it. The truth was, the memories which had been at work with her had wonderfully moved her heart, and following straight on this, the relief of seeing young Whitmarsh return quite unharmed, was greater than she suspected.

Her manner, her very tones, toward him, were full of some interest, some subtle sweetness of which the girl herself was quite unconscious.

Young Whitmarsh looked up in the lady's face, and its beauty, touched and enhanced by that solemn splendor of moonlight, worked a sudden madness in his heart and brain. His passion slipped the leash which his will had held so long. "Then you really mean it, Miss Carruthers? You are not a woman to tell a lie for courtesy's sake; you will really miss me?"

The evening must have wrought its enchantment with the girl, too, — taken her into its own mood of solemn peace and joy, — for ordinarily a speech like this would have startled her, but it did nothing of the kind now.

"I shall most seriously miss you, Mr. Whitmarsh," answered clearly and sweetly the voice of Marjorie Carruthers.

He stopped their walk at that moment, held her still and looked her in the face: "Then, Marjorie, give me the right to say that in all our lives to come, you shall miss nothing that it is in my power to give you!"

Marjorie stood still, much like one stunned by a blow. "What do you mean, Mr. Whitmarsh?" she asked, slowly.

"I mean, Marjorie Carruthers, that I ask you to be my wife; that I offer you the life you once gave back to me, and which seems worthless to me now, unless I may have the joy of devoting to you whatever it is, or whatever it may be."

The words thrilled through the girl's soul as no human words had ever done, with a power of unutterable tenderness.

The exultation, the rapture, the sweetness, of one solitary moment, as that speech entered her heart, shook and swayed the tall, graceful woman as reeds by river banks are swayed by slow winds; but into all this the next thought broke like crashes of thunder. She covered her face with her hands one moment, while a swift spasm of agony passed over her, and then Marjorie Carruthers drew herself up, and, white and hard and frozen, looked into the face of Benjamin Whitmarsh.

CHAPTER XV.

"No, I will not be your wife, Benjamin Whitmarsh!"

The words — dropping in a slow sternness from the girl's lips — chilled one in the warm summer evening like hard, cold drops of hail falling into the heat of a summer day.

It seemed as though a flaming sword, shutting him out from Paradise, had gleamed suddenly before the man's eyes; yet he did not blanch. They two stood still looking into each other's faces, and the hush and the radiance of the moonlight were upon them both.

"Have you no more to say to me than that, Marjorie Carruthers?" he asked. "I think that any man would have a right to ask you why you answered him just like this."

He had taken his fate from her lips manfully; but through all the storm within, whose awful raging was only measured by her white, frozen calmness, Marjorie yet felt that what he spoke was true, — that having said to her what he had, she owed him, as woman to man, some further answer.

"I thought you knew it — I supposed my whole manner had told you that. It was cruel to misinterpret me so;" her calmness giving way now, her words breaking out in a passionate incoherence, in singular contrast with her coldness of a few moments before. She turned away from him.

Benjamin Whitmarsh followed her. To him it was a matter of life or death. With his soft, strong hand he took hold of her shoulder and turned her around to him: "Marjorie," — until to-night he had never called her this, — "where have I misinterpreted you; how have I been cruel to you?" His face and voice that of a man in deadly earnest, he compelled her to answer him.

She walked on in a rapid, nervous way, which showed she was moved to the centre: "To suppose that my manner could mean more to you than what it was, — the trust and confidence of a friend! You have taught me at last, Benjamin Whitmarsh, what a fool I have made of myself;" stopping then a moment, and glaring on him with the angry splendor of her eyes.

"A fool of yourself, Marjorie Carruthers?" keeping pace with her rapid walk up and down the veranda, and only anxious to shield her from some bitterness of self-contempt, which yet was a mystery to him.

"Whatever my presumption may seem to you, I absolve you now and ever from encouraging it by word or look." Her hasty steps slackened a little, and she held her breath back to listen.

"You are not the woman, I take it, to do that to living man, and I — " His voice paused here, and shook a little, as reeds by water-courses do, with faint tremors of wind among them. "I have said to you what I have to-night, because I had no power to help it, because my soul must speak these words to yours, and because, scornfully and bitterly as you have rejected me, Marjorie Carruthers, I think I shall be glad to the day of my death that I made you this offer."

There was every chance of their misapprehending each other. In her blind pride, Marjorie would be apt to clutch at a wrong meaning, and how could the man divine what was going on in the girl's soul? She stopped again, and fronted him now; if a true manliness had not lain at the bottom of him, it seemed that the scorn which flashed into her beautiful white face must have withered him. "You have done your duty, Mr. Whitmarsh," she said. "I have answered you; I hope it will afford ample satisfaction for the rest of your life to remember this."

"And this is all your answer, Marjorie Carruthers? Nothing I can say can help my case?" There was a little sharp throb of pain at the end of these words, but he smothered it and drew himself up to face the truth, whatever that might be. "I think you know I am not a man to thrust myself on any reluctant woman; only I want to know your answer is final, — that there is no hope for me; that no long waiting and no devotion on my part can win your love?"

Of a sudden she stopped again. You must remember that her veins were on fire, that she was quivering with pride and excitement, and some strange terror under all, lest the man by her side should reach some knowledge of the agony of pain which was tearing her heart at that moment.

"My answer is final," fronting him with her white, motionless face again. "Not all the world could tempt me to be your wife, Benjamin Whitmarsh. If it came to deciding between death and marrying you this hour, and the block was made ready out yonder and the headsman waited, I would go down quietly and tell him to do his work, so help me God!"

She believed she was telling the truth then. You could not have doubted that, seeing her face.

Benjamin Whitmarsh looked at it a moment, and something came into his eyes that was like the love and grief with which we look for the last time on dead faces. But he was calm as herself. Then he took her hands in his. They were cold and numb, and seemed to strike a chill through him. "I shall never ask you again. Good-by, Marjorie."

Then he turned and left her standing there, and she went upstairs, and his last words rang in her ears and down into her heart. It seemed that "Good-by, Marjorie," with which he had quitted her, might have been spoken at the foot of the scaffold by one who was looking his last on the pleasant sunshine and the green earth, and going away from its life and hope and joy. She sank down in a chair by the window, with a worn, tired look in her frozen face, that was pitiful to see. She leaned her head on her hand wearily a moment, but her thoughts, whatever they were, proved too much for her. She flung them away with an angry gesture and started to her feet: "To think that he should have dared to ask me to be his wife, — fancied he could pay his debt in that way! If I loved you," — her eyes blazing as she paced the room, as though they confronted some terrible phantom, — if I loved you with my whole soul Benjamin Whitmarsh, I would be too truly your friend to let you sacrifice yourself to pay your debt; yet you gave the best you had, — the best; it was not your fault," a sudden softness coming into her face, and she went and stood by the window and gazed up at the stars, and at the great, red summer moon swimming among them.

The tears came into her eyes and quenched their hot splendor. Her mouth shook out of all its pride into some sharp pain. "Oh, my life, my life!" she moaned in a whisper. "What shall I do with it? If the axe had been ready and the headsman stood there, God knows I should not have been sorry."

After this, a great change came over Marjorie Carruthers, — a change that was like the going down of still, radiant September days into the cold and darkness of equinoctial storms. Whatever there had been singular and aggravating in her moods before, they were ten times worse now; even Mrs. Whitmarsh had to admit that, to herself at least.

It was impossible to please the creature; all her antagonisms seemed awake now. She was restive, miserable, sullen, aggravating, as the mood might be, and led poor Eleanor a hard life of it, for Marjorie had that magnetic quality which seemed to communicate itself to the very atmosphere about her. Most people could not live in them without being infected by her moods; she made a very morning glow and radiance of gladness, which acted like sunlight and electricity on others, or her restless, discordant frames seemed to have a fatal power of infecting everybody who came within their sphere. Yet, with all there was to regret in Marjorie Carruthers, her faults were not of the mean, commonplace type. I hope she is clear enough by this time for you to recognize that fact. There was none of that peevish fretfulness which affects one like the perpetual drizzle of some days, that do not seem to possess force enough to concentrate themselves into a downright rain.

There was something of a half-tamed, wild creature about Marjorie at this time. She did not seem at ease anywhere. The flowers outside and the books within failed of their old charm.

She was never still five minutes; complaining sometimes of fatigue and nervousness; and she grew absolutely regardless of her health, going off on long walks in early damps and late dews, keeping Mrs. Whitmarsh on the constant watch, following her to the door and the gate with shawls and wrappings, for which she very likely got small thanks, although Marjorie would usually condescend to stand passively enough while her cousin enveloped her, and sometimes a little smile would come into the white weariness of her face, and she would say, "O Eleanor, what's the use? — I'm not worth the trouble."

The smile and the tones always touched the heart of

Eleanor Whitmarsh: "Marjorie, don't talk like that. You hurt me."

Then the lady would go into the house and watch the girl going up the road, — a tall, graceful, delicate figure cut out sharply against the horizon. "Poor Marjorie!" Mrs. Whitmarsh would go over and over to herself, thinking of her cousin's look, and a half-conscious dread would sometimes haunt her that Marjorie might be tempted to do some harm to herself.

As for John Whitmarsh, the man's forbearance with Miss Carruthers' whims and freaks was wonderful. It did not at this juncture seem possible to please her, and after a while Eleanor wisely gave up the attempt, and let matters take care of themselves.

Meanwhile, Ben Whitmarsh had gone to New York, and the very night on which his return was looked for at Tuxbury, there came a telegram, saying he should join a party of friends at the sea-shore for the next week or two.

His sister-in-law was plunged quite in despair about ever bringing the pretty little romance on which her heart had so long been set to its legitimate conclusions of bridal favors and honeymoon.

One morning, it happened rather unusually that the two ladies were alone together: Marjorie was in one of her worst moods. Even the two things that never seemed to rasp her, — the baby and the shepherd dog, a huge, shaggy, mottled creature, with the devotion of his species, — had been conscious that something was wrong.

"Baby" sat on the floor in the midst of his toys, and stared at Aunt Madge with his large, wondering eyes, and the dog crept to her feet and gazed up at the beautiful, proud face with some kind of dumb human pity in his look. Marjorie had taken an easy-chair, and leaned her cheek against it, so that her profile was struck out sharply toward her cousin.

Mrs. Whitmarsh saw how thin it had grown of late. Marjorie had not eaten enough to keep a sparrow alive. The girl was not well, her cousin thought with keen alarm and pity. The trouble within, whatever it was, was wearing on her nerves and life, and went deeper than one of her ordinary tempestuous moods, which were certain to clear up in a little while. What tumult and unhappiness were within, that brought out that weary, unhappy look on the girl's face?

It was dangerous ground in times like these to approach Marjorie with argument or persuasion. The proud, sensitive nature was much like some thoroughbred animal who starts and plunges at a word; but as Eleanor gazed the question burst out of her lips, half in pity, half in despair, "Marjorie, what does possess you?"

The girl started a little and turned around. She was silent a moment, looking at her cousin with some hopelessness in her face; then she answered wearily: "I don't know, Eleanor, — the devil, I suspect."

"Sometimes I fear he does, Marjorie."

There was a little silence between the two after this; then Marjorie rose up and walked across the room, and the dog got up, and shook his mottled hide and followed her;

she stopped before her cousin: "You've been very patient with me, Eleanor; I've seen it all along; but I have no right to try you like this. I ought to go away." She spoke softly and mournfully, and the pain and the weariness did not leave her face.

"But where would you go, Marjorie? I thought this was more to you like home than any place;" her tone full of surprise and pain.

"I thought so too, Eleanor; but the sting has got into my blood again. I don't know what it means — what possesses me — as you say; but I have no right to make you unhappy, or John either. I seem to have a fatal gift of impressing others with my states of mind, when I would not. There is at least so much grace in me that I am sorry for that."

"But, child, where will you go? You are not capable of taking care of yourself. In your delicate health, too! The world is a vast, cold, rattling place, Marjorie, although it may be very ready to heap praises on your head. You will want even such love as we have in the little cottage at Tuxbury to offer you."

It seemed as though those words touched some quivering nerve in the girl's soul, for Marjorie winced and caught her breath. Then the tears came into her eyes as they were already in her cousin's. She leaned over and kissed the lady with a sudden tenderness. "How good you are, Eleanor!" and, hearing the words, you would not have doubted that they came from the speaker's heart.

Mrs. Whitmarsh drew the girl down on a cricket at her feet, and smoothed the dark, glossy head tenderly: "You will not let us be 'good' to you, Marjorie, and now you are talking of doing the cruellest thing of all,—of going away to leave us."

She looked up, her eyes touched and soft: "Do you really want me to stay, Eleanor? What good have I ever done to you since I came to the cottage?"

"What good! Ah, Marjorie, can you ask that question, remembering one night?"

The girl sprang to her feet in an instant, as though the kindly tones had been a fierce insult.

"There it is!" she said. "You must be forever talking about that, Eleanor, and feeling that I have placed you under some awful burden of gratitude; and so you bear with my tempers like a saint, and are ready to take me, faults and all, for the rest of my days."

Mrs. Whitmarsh put up her hands again and drew the girl down on the cricket, softly but firmly. "No, Marjorie," she said, with some unusual gravity, "I never thought of any debt when I asked you to stay with us. I supposed you knew me better than that."

The heat went down in Marjorie's cheeks, the blaze in her eyes.

"But you said — you know what you said, Eleanor," she faltered.

"Ah, Marjorie, you were always so swift to jump at conclusions! Do you think I have loved you any better since that night when you saved poor Ben's life?"

"I fancied you thought so." Then she burst out with a sudden fierceness: "But gratitude is not love?"

"No, certainly," replied Mrs. Whitmarsh, gravely and firmly, like one who knew the ground on which she was treading: "Gratitude is not love. I could never mistake the one for the other."

Marjorie looked up, and whatever the inward tumult was which made that storm in her face, a sudden sweetness shone out of it now: "I know you would not tell me anything but the truth, Eleanor," she said. "I believe you."

And she laid her head down in her cousin's lap like a tired child's, while her eyes swam in blinding tears.

"Foolish, perverse child!" said Eleanor, stroking the beautiful, glossy head again. "To get up any absurd notion about gratitude, after all the years that I have known and loved you! O Marjorie, that was doing me a cruel wrong!"

"Forgive me, Eleanor," her voice choked with tears, and humble as a repentant child's.

"Is there anything in the world which I would not forgive you, dear?"

After this the two women had a long talk together. Mrs. Whitmarsh knew the time had come now, and Marjorie did not shrink or start at any of the questions, although her cousin tried to probe to the core of the discordance and unhappiness which possessed the girl; and Marjorie was honest, — at least she meant to be: if there were facts her soul dared not turn and face, she would not let herself believe they were there. She confessed her misery; some strange unrest that haunted her by day and night like an evil spirit, wearing her nerves and maddening her with hard, fierce, bitter moods. There was no rest nor calm for her in anything. Where the hot, rasping impatience would end she did not know. She should like to think it would be in the cool, dark silences of the grave; and those words set Eleanor to crying, so that Marjorie blamed herself roundly, she not being at all given to sentimentalizing over her prospective grave.

There being no other apparent cause for Marjorie's trouble, Mrs. Whitmarsh set it all down to nervous derangement, and descanted eloquently on the hold which this gained of soul and body; then slid off, by a very natural train of association, to the virtues of Peruvian bark and Port wine, ending at last with a devout prayer for Dr. Avery's return from his Canada trip, he being the only physician that unmanageable young woman would so much as hear a hint about consulting.

The baby manifested his sympathy in the prettiest way, coming up and laying his warm little cheek on her wet one, and patting her forehead with his bits of dimpled fingers, while Gray, the faithful old shepherd dog, pushed his huge body between them and licked the girl's hand.

All these things did Marjorie good; and yet Mrs. Whitmarsh had an uncomfortable feeling that all their talk had not struck to the core of Marjorie's trouble, only touched its surface; but this kept her all the more firmly insisting that she had gone to the root of the matter, and that Marjorie's nerves must bear the responsibility of her moods.

Something in the eyes of both the baby and the dog, when at last Marjorie lifted her head from her cousin's lap, reminded her of Berry Shumway, when they had met on the late cold winter afternoon. Whether the talk that morning had or had not done Marjorie any permanent good, it had cleared her atmosphere for the time, and there was something touching in the way she kissed Eleanor and told her she loved her better than anything on earth.

She went out among the flower-beds and brought in the blossoms, heavy with dew and fragrance, and filled the vases, with something of her old animation; but all the while she was asking herself whether the best thing she could do would not be to go away from Tuxbury.

Yet the world outside looked so lonely and wide that she shuddered. Some of the last talks she had had with her uncle before that dreadful illness came back to her now.

Careless and extravagant in all business affairs as the man had been, by taste and temperament, he must yet have begun to realize that the sluices he had opened in his fortune had heavily drained his resources. No doubt that knowledge was at the bottom of the plan on which they had both set their hearts, — a cottage home in Switzerland, all grace and quiet and beauty, where they could live, after their own hearts, a life intellectual, æsthetic, in the midst of books and pictures and the solemn mountains and the warm, joyful valleys about them, — a life of ease and luxury too. "And we can run over to Paris or London or across into Italy whenever you get tired of an old man's society, Marjorie, my bird of Paradise," her uncle would say.

Marjorie would run her fingers through the crisp, beautiful gray hair and laugh out: "O Uncle Hal, an hour of that old man's talk is worth a whole year of any younger one's I ever had the honor of listening to."

They had settled upon Interlachen. The whole project was ripe for the fulfilment, — the man and woman, both tired of their nomadic life, — when death came between them, and instead of the pretty cottage among the mountains at Interlachen, there was a lower roof and a narrower for one of them.

Since that time Marjorie had put all those memories out of her mind, as one does the remembrance of terrible pain, but they came back on her now as fresh winds from off the land come to those who have been tossing long and homesick on the sea.

"Why was it too late to have the home at Interlachen?" reasoned Marjorie Carruthers. "It was true its dearest life had been quenched; but still the grand old mountains were there, and the warm valleys amongst them, and all the fine exhilaration of the atmosphere, whose first breath, her uncle used to declare, took twenty years' stiffness out of his bones.

The first thought of leaving Eleanor cost Marjorie a sharp pang, but she could not stay for the rest of her days at Tuxbury, especially as that was to be the home of Ben Whitmarsh. They could never get on together under the same roof after what had passed between them one night.

At least she would take herself out of the sight of a man who was weighed down with such a terrific sense of gratitude as young Whitmarsh must be, when it had actually driven him into offering her his hand, and ended in making her cordially hate him for daring to insult her in that fashion.

For Marjorie Carruthers began to think she did hate this man; and, to tell the truth, I honestly believe she would have seized eagerly on any fact which might have told to his disadvantage, thus lowering his character and justifying her contempt, even though it came to his telling a lie or picking somebody's pocket. She might have been glad, I say, to know something of that sort; but not all the world could have made Marjorie Carruthers believe an ignoble act of Benjamin Whitmarsh. Even his proposing to her was not that, but evinced, at least, an innate nobleness and generosity; she had to admit it, sorely against her will.

The idea of a home in Switzerland having taken possession of her, and in her restless, tumultuous state any purpose which afforded her thoughts food to dwell on was welcome, Marjorie's next purpose was to secure the right sort of servants.

This was a matter of great importance to her, as she would be sole mistress of her home, and she intended to carry out all its details, so far as possible, after the plan her uncle had formed. She wanted domestics faithful, honest, loyal; and her comparatively slender income would not admit of expensive attendance, although her resources would go three times as far in Switzerland as in America, thanks to Marjorie's experience of life abroad.

One day, turning over all those things, — for Marjorie clung with desperate energy to her new plan, making it shut out all other horizons where her thoughts might have wandered, — Berry Shumway came into the girl's mind, — Berry Shumway, with her brown, peaked face and the red mouth all a-tremble, and the look of awe and devotion in her eyes on that solitary time that they had met each other.

The doctor had called the child a "deft, handy little soul, living there all alone with her big brother."

This brought out the young workman, with his sturdy figure and the slouch in his brawny shoulders, and, above all, the strange, awe-struck stare with which he had regarded her when she gave him her hand in the Furnace gallery that afternoon.

Strangely enough, it struck this odd Marjorie Carruthers that the young workman and his sister would be the very sort of people she should need when she came to go abroad. She wanted a man-servant, sturdy and reliable, and a bright, active little housemaid that it would be agreeable to have about her.

Then Marjorie reflected, too, with that kindly generosity which was a part of her nature, and which went far to make the secret of her charm with her inferiors, that Berry Shumway would be in many ways benefited and elevated by the change in her lot, — from the coarse factory life, to the quiet and refinement of a home like the one Miss Carruthers had planned for herself.

Then, as for wages, the workman and his sister would lose nothing by the exchange, for Marjorie could, at least, offer them as much as Tuxbury afforded for their services. The result of all these cogitations was that Miss Carruthers' manner came somewhat out of the chill and gloom which had hitherto possessed it, and the whole household felt the change. She did not, however, confide her plan to Eleanor, who would be certain to oppose it with all her might, thinking the whole a most romantic and unpractical scheme; and then Marjorie felt herself that when the time came it would be hard enough to tear herself away from her cousin.

"She can come to me every summer, though, the dear creature," mused the girl, and then she looked down and met Gray's eyes with the dumb sympathy in them: —

"Old fellow, you will go with me, won't you?" bending down and smoothing the shaggy hide with her long, soft fingers.

The creature rose up, shook his huge body and laid his fore paws tenderly on her lap, and Marjorie knew that he had answered her as well as though he had spoken.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONE afternoon, Berry Shumway, at work among the pinks and marigolds in her square of front yard, heard a little noise at the front gate and looked up suddenly.

What a vision stood there of grace and daintiness and beauty! It seemed to make the very air finer and purer about it, — at least in Berry Shumway's eyes, as she dropped her pruning-knife.

"O ma'am, is that you?" stammered the girl, glowing with wonder and pleasure.

The tall, elegant woman smiled her sweetest: "Yes, Berry. May I come in?"

Berry ran to the gate and unhooked it, shaking off a little sand from her brown fingers.

The lady shook hands warmly. What a soft, velvety feel the little pink palm had! Berry thought.

"I see you know me, Berry?" said the lady.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, indeed," replied the girl, and she thought anybody, having seen that face once, must know it anywhere for the rest of their lives.

"I took a fancy to drive over and see you this afternoon. The gardener was going out to the ore-beds, and so I made him drop me where the roads forked, and walked the last mile. He will come for me. I see you are fond of flowers, child, and they show for themselves what loving care you take of them!"

Berry's face — the small, bright, honest face — flushed with pleasure under the freckles at the lady's praise, while the latter's gaze swept among the pinks and marigolds and the plumes of white phlox and the peonies that opened their great, fervid, red hearts to the warm rays of the sun.

They had reached the door-step now, and Berry, a little steadied from her first surprise and excitement, which was natural enough considering who her guest was, — for she could hardly have been more amazed had an angel with white wings dropped from the clouds at her gate, — Berry remembered that she had her duties as hostess now to perform, and there was some force in this brown little factory-girl that, whenever any work was set before her, would not permit her to shirk it; nay, more, she would put all her might of brain or brawn into it.

"Will you walk into the house, ma'am?" she said, pushing the door wide open and standing there. "You are welcome — oh, I am sure nobody in the world would be so welcome as you are."

"Thank you, child;" and the smile of Marjorie Carruthers came out at its sweetest, and her whole face seemed to swim in it, as the faces of saints do in a nimbus of glory.

She went into the little front room, and its shady coolness was welcome after the heat outside, and Berry brought the cushioned rocking-chair that was as easy as possible, and placed a stool at the lady's feet and a great palmleaf in her hand.

"Why, how very comfortable you have made me already! I think you must have a knack at doing these things," said Miss Carruthers, leaning back in the armchair, her eyes taking in, without seeming to do this, everything there was in the room, — the striped carpet, the blue vases filled with flowers on the mantel, and the air of thorough neatness which made the workman's little cool front room seem a very pleasant sort of a place that afternoon.

"O ma'am, it's so very little that I can do," answered Berry; and she thought, although she would not say this, that a palace would only be a fitting place to receive such a guest.

"Now, Berry, bring your chair here, and we will have a quiet chat together. I came over on purpose for this, because I had a fancy to know you better, and then I thought myself pretty certain to find you at home this afternoon, because of the holiday at the Mills."

"Yes, ma'am," the shyness slipping off from the girl more and more at the lady's gracious manner, which was pervaded with no subtle air of condescension, notwithstanding the immense disparity between the beautiful, cultured, elegant woman, and the brown, ignorant, hard-working factory girl. "And I am all alone, too, for Hardy has gone over to the county town to see the training. He's fond of drums and music and a grand crowd, and I coaxed him to go."

"That was right. I have seen this big brother of yours, too, Berry."

"Yes, ma'am, at the Furnace; he told me about it. I was ashamed of his actions then, but the sight of all those grand people was too much for him; and then it was pretty soon after he got back to work, and it took Hardy a long time to get over what happened before."

"But I hope he has done that by this time," said Miss Carruthers, with the kindest interest.

"Ye—es, ma'am," a doubt clinging along her affirmative. "Hardy has pretty much got back his spirits. It's done him good, being among the flowers; he always took o that wonderful, and then his work has put new heart into him. Sometimes I hear him whistlin' a tune when he is digging around the roots, and it does me good, and I think, 'You've come back to your old self, Hardy Shumway.'"

"You are fond of this big brother of yours, I see, Berry," said the lady.

"Oh, yes, ma'am," the little brown face all alive with feeling. "Nobody knows Hardy as well as I do, and all the good there is in him. He is so kind to me, too, — kinder than ever, it seems to me, nowadays."

Encouraged by something she could not analyze in Miss Carruthers' manner, which drew her on to talk, Berry's glib little tongue slipped along without any stammering, telling, in her honest way, her simple little story.

It did Miss Carruthers good to listen, too, — drew that proud, reticent woman out of herself, which these days was the most disagreeable subject in the world to Marjorie Carruthers. She had her own share of the talking too; but of course all that the woman and the girl said to each other that afternoon, although, taken at the time, it seemed to have its own pleasant meanings and fitness, would not be worth writing down in a book.

Berry Shumway had inherited her English mother's love of order and hospitality, with her nice executive quality; and that morning she had set her heart on giving Hardy a little holiday treat when he came home from his visit to the military display in the adjoining town.

So Berry had made a loaf of cake and taken it out of the oven, — such a light, fresh, golden-brown loaf that it might have taken the prize at a county fair; and she had discovered on her daily trips to the Mills a few raspberry-bushes in a sunny corner of a lonely pasture-field, where the first fruit had begun to hang, the factory-girl thought, like great red heaps of fallen stars. Berry had visited these bushes almost every day, watching the slow ripening of the berries, cherishing secretly a little plan which she had carried out that holiday morning, going off surreptitiously, and returning an hour or two later with a covered dish heaped with the first great, red, fresh, lush berries; more than this, — for Berry never did things by halves, and Hardy showed so much kind thoughtfulness to her these days that his sister was never quite so happy as when she was busy over some pleasant little surprise for him, — she hunted up a small, old china-jug of her mother's, and actually had this filled with fresh cream and hung it in the well to keep cool until her brother's return.

They had been talking together an hour perhaps, Berry giving the lady a good many glimpses into her narrow, solitary, but not unhappy life, and into the warm little heart that made comfort and light through all the loneliness and poverty; and which, blessing somebody else, had its own portion pressed down and overflowing in return; when of a sudden the girl started up, asking the lady to excuse her a moment, and she hurried out of the room, leaving Marjorie alone, the latter looking more animated and like herself than she had looked for weeks.

Berry was back again in an incredibly short space, bringing with her a small tray, whose defects she had covered with a snowy towel, a glass dish heaped with great, shining, red berries and deluged with cream, and the loaf of golden-brown cake cut into large slices.

She set these before the astonished lady: "Won't you please to try them, ma'am?"

"Why, Berry, where in the world do you get food like this? It is a feast dainty enough for the gods!"

"I picked the berries, and made the cake myself, ma'am, this morning, because it was holiday," answered the child, blushing with pleasure.

Miss Carruthers' long walk had given her an appetite, — something, as Eleanor could tell you, which she had not manifested for a long while; then fresh wild raspberries were a luxury she had not tasted this season.

She laid her gloves on one side, took the tray into her lap, and really it seemed to her in her whole life she had never enjoyed anything quite so much as she did the cake and berries under the low roof of the workman. Of all things that Miss Carruthers should be eating there, and thinking that, too!

As for Berry, the little soul was in a kind of seventh heaven of delight over the visit and the lady's evident enjoyment of her small feast, and the wonder of what Hardy would say when she came to tell him all about it.

"No, Berry, thank you," at last. "I cannot find room for another mouthful, or I would not stop; but two great slices of that cake and three saucers of berries have at last proved my limits," laughing half to herself.

Then Miss Carruthers looked gravely at Berry for a few moments: "Child," she said, "I think it would be pleasant to have you always about me. There are not half-a-dozen people in the world of whom I could say so much."

Berry could hardly believe her own ears. She blushed crimson with pleasure: "O ma'am, what could I do for you?" she stammered.

"A good deal, I think, child," laying her white hand on the girl's brown, thin one. "Some time, perhaps, we will talk more about that."

"Yes, ma'am," faltered Berry, her wits all astray.

"It does me good to look at your little, bright, honest, true face. I knew it was that, Berry, from the first time I saw it gazing up at me in the factory-road that afternoon. It looks plumper and happier now than it did then, I am glad to perceive."

A little tremulousness came into the bright warmth now: "I had had a great deal of trouble then, you see, ma'am; but it's all gone now," voice and smile clearing up brightly.

Miss Carruthers led the girl to talk of that time, and Berry, although it was not her nature to dwell on her troubles, told much more of the miserable story of last winter than she really had any idea she was doing, and Marjorie, whose heart was as tender as her pride was terrible, was awfully shocked with this glimpse into privation and suffering.

"If I had only known it," she said, "it should never have happened."

"Oh, I didn't know there was so many good folks in the world until it came out;" and that brought up Dr. Avery, about whom Berry could never say enough; and then, after the long waiting and misery, the happy night when the letter came from the "beautiful young gentleman," and Hardy was reinstated once more in his employment. If I could only tell you the whole story as Berry Shumway did; all the lights and shadows on it; the strong brother, in his sullen despair; the young girl braver than him through all, keeping a bright face and hopeful words before him, but her heart aching and failing her as the days went on and no help came.

She choked over the memory now, but voice and lips steadied themselves in a moment. "She had never doubted God would bring them out some way," she said.

"She had clung to him always, very much as she would have clung to her mother's hand, going through some dreadful dark, where she could not see her face, and he had not forgotten; he had brought her out into the light again, — her and Hardy."

"Yes, — yes, to be sure," said Marjorie, in a kind of absent way, and she was wondering, meanwhile, how much truth lay at the bottom of this child's words, and wishing her own lonely, hunted soul had the anchor of poor little Berry Shumway's faith.

Berry must have been saying something about young Whitmarsh, for when Marjorie listened again, the words were, "Such a kind, beautiful, noble young gentleman as he is! but you know all about him, ma'am."

Marjorie instinctively understood to whom she referred: "Yes, he is very good," she said, simply; and Berry dropped the subject, not knowing why she did so.

In a little while Marjorie looked wistfully at the girl again: "What a happy face it is, Berry!" she said. "I think there is a happy little soul behind it, — happier than mine," her voice dropping over these last words, and some unutterable mournfulness clinging to them.

"I — happier than you, ma'am!" her dark eyes opening wide on her guest with dismay.

"I fancy so, Berry. That strikes you as very strange, I see," and Miss Carruthers' smile with its sadness endorsed her words.

"But, ma'am, such a grand, beautiful, wealthy lady as you are, and then everybody to love and praise you!

Why, I have thought a good many times it seemed to me you must be happier than anybody in the world."

Marjorie drew a sigh, and her faint smile came about her lips and touched them with weariness and pain.

It hurt Berry to see that. She stumbled on with a touching earnestness: "And then when you think, ma'am, what you did that night, — saved that grand, beautiful gentleman's life, when all the strong men about him had turned cowards, and how he must feel about it all his life to come — "

"There, Berry," interrupted Marjorie, with a little involuntary movement, "I don't want he should feel any way about it. If there is one word in this world I hate more than another it is gratitude."

Berry's face was a study then in its utter consternation. She drew a long breath or two, then her eyes sparkled with a new thought: "You mean, ma'am, that you don't like anybody to feel they owe you a great debt, because in that case one might be uncomfortable about paying it."

"Well, yes, I mean that partly," looking at the girl and wondering at the shrewd little brain behind the brown face. "Shouldn't you feel just so, Berry?"

She was serious a moment, twisting her fingers together, then she looked up and answered very slowly and earnestly, "If I had done some great good to anybody, and they felt always that a great debt must be paid me, it would hurt me, I am sure; but I can't help feeling that always in the best sort of gratitude there is some love which makes the paying pleasanter."

It was curious, the effect which that girl's speech had on Marjorie Carruthers. A flush came into her pale face from chin to forehead; she stared at Berry as though the poor little child were some sybil who had sounded a new truth for her. She played nervously with the rings on her long slender fingers, but she did not say one word.

A while after that, though, Miss Carruthers had the talking wholly to herself, and Berry, her wide-awake soul in her face, was listening to every word, for the lady was describing the great world beyond the sea; the vast, solemn mountains with the snows forever upon their summits; the warm, sunny valleys with the soft tumult of brooks among them; the pretty, picturesque little cottages scattered over the landscape, and the peasants with their bright, ancient dresses at their work in the fields or gathered in groups, singing and dancing in the open air; and Miss Carruthers, watching Berry's face, saw that her eyes grew darker and brighter with wonder and curiosity as she listened.

Then the lady went on to describe the home she was planning for herself in this beautiful land far across the sea, and Marjorie loved to dwell on the details, and her great eyes sparkled and her fair cheek glowed with a new pleasure, and Berry sat still and drank in every word.

"Oh, it must be just like heaven to be there!" was the factory-girl's comment when the lady paused at last.

"Do you think so, Berry?" and again Marjorie Carruthers' smile caught her face up in its radiance.

"But I shall want somebody to live with me and take care of me in my pretty little nest among the mountains far across the sea, — somebody whom I can like and who will like me; somebody prompt and swift and helpful of hand and foot and eye, who will keep the home bright and orderly, and prepare the meals and wait on me; somebody who will be made happy by living with me; somebody who will be a loyal little friend at all times and understand my moods, and serve me less for money than for love. Do you know where I can find such a little friend, Berry?"

"No, ma'am," said the girl; but a dim light was beginning to dawn on her, and yet she could not, dared not, believe anything so wonderful.

"Well, I think I do," replied Marjorie, with her ravishing smile; "and the name of this strange little somebody who is to go with me, and take care of me, and have happy times herself with the books and the flowers, and see the wonderful world across the sea, is Berry Shumway!"

"O ma'am, do you mean me — really *me?*" her face hot with astonishment and delight.

"Yes, child, I mean you. Do you think you would really like to go and live with me there?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. It would be pleasanter than anything else in the world — only — only I know so little; I could not take care of such a grand lady and such a pretty house."

"I am the best judge of that, Berry. I see what a prompt, deft, handy little soul, to quote Dr. Avery, you are. I am a great deal more at home in life abroad than I am in my own country, and I, or somebody else, could teach you all you would have to learn. Those native bright wits of yours will carry you over all difficulties that would be likely to rise in your way."

"Oh, thank you, ma'am!" said Berry, flattered and amazed almost beyond the power of further words. In a moment she added, "I would try my best, ma'am," in her quiet, steadfast way, which left no doubt.

Another moment, and the dazzle in her face was quenched: "There is Hardy. Why, I had forgotten him!"

"I had not, Berry. We should need a man to take care of the grounds and do the errands and manage affairs, — somebody intelligent, trusty, and faithful. If your brother is that sort of man, and would like to go with me abroad, I could make it at least worth his while as to stay here at work in the Mills of Tuxbury."

"O ma'am, I am sure Hardy would go," her face all alive again. "There is nobody in the world whom he would be so glad to serve as you. I've heard him talk, and I know; but oh, what will he say when I come to tell him?"

Just then a buggy drove up to the gate. "There, they've come for me at last," said Marjorie, rising up; but she did not say it like one who was particularly glad to go. "Of course, Berry, you will mention what I have told you to no one but your brother. Not a soul beside yourself suspects my plans, and it will take a little while to mature them. It is fair that you should have time to consider the matter well, and I can trust you, and him also, I think."

The gardener came in, profuse with apologies for his delay. They had met with some slight accident at the ore-beds.

Miss Carruthers cut him short: "It is not of the least consequence, Mark. I have been in no great hurry."

She learned on her return home, that night, that Ben Whitmarsh had returned from his two weeks' visit at the sea-shore.

CHAPTER XVII.

THERE was nothing in the meeting of Benjamin Whitmarsh and Marjorie Carruthers to strike an ordinary observer. Whatever lay underneath, each was too well-bred man and woman, to let it show itself on the surface of an ordinary greeting.

There was, of course, an under-consciousness of all that had passed between them so lately, while their talk slipped smoothly as quiet swells of tides among rocks, over the commonplaces of life, — the weather and the people at the sea-shore, and the latest news from Washington and Europe.

Into this smooth talk Mrs. Whitmarsh broke with one of those sudden, careless questions that strike down into old associations and memories, and fairly take away our breaths.

"Where in the world have you been all this while, Marjorie? If I had not known you well enough to be prepared for almost anything in the way of gypsy freaks and desperate, wild-bushmen sort of adventures, I should have grown seriously alarmed as night drew on."

"I — I went over to the Settlement," answered Marjorie, feeling that the truth must out, and wishing Eleanor's busy tongue had seized hold of almost any other question than precisely that one.

The next followed swiftly upon the heels of the other, and proved even worse.

"What in the world, Marjorie Carruthers, should take you over to the Settlement?"

There was no help for it. The answer must be forthcoming, and there sat Benjamin Whitmarsh to hear it. "I made a call on little Berry Shumway," answered Marjorie, simply.

"Ah, yes," replied Eleanor; and she felt there was no more to be said, and that the name had brought back the most terrible hour of all their lives; and she speedily turned the conversation into other channels.

As for Ben Whitmarsh, you may be certain that he had his own thoughts about this visit of Miss Carruthers; actually envied the poor little factory-girl for the next few minutes, and yet it was singular enough that her affection for Marjorie had its origin in what that young lady had once done for his sake.

In these weeks that he had been at the sea-shore the young man fancied he had gained the mastery over his own will, and had returned home rejoicing in his own strength.

Ben Whitmarsh had his theories about love, and had always maintained that a man must be made of dreadfully flaccid stuff who would let a woman's "No" work serious havoc with his life.

Let him stand up and front it bravely. A man who did otherwise might be certain he richly deserved his answer. As for himself, Ben Whitmarsh had little sympathy and less patience with the spoony, sentimental tribe who hugged their own griefs much like children stretching their hands and sobbing for the moon.

Thus the young man reasoned, not out of his own experience; and after his return to Tuxbury the days came to test his theories, and proved them a good deal like ropes of sand.

Marjorie Carruthers did not return to those unaccountable moods which had preceded the young man's departure, and which had infected the whole household. She had one of those natures to whom action of some sort is necessary as vital breath, and whatever she did, she put heart and soul into it.

She was absorbed now in this purpose of the new home abroad, which was not so visionary, after all, as it would probably have seemed to most of Miss Carruthers' friends. With all her romantic notions and ideas, she had a substratum of that strong, practical common-sense which would always save her from plunging recklessly into any absurd projects. She looked this matter of the home at Interlachen on all sides, counted its costs in plain, mathematical relations with her own income, and was satisfied that the expenses might be met, allowing a margin for collateral ones, without making any demands upon the principal.

Marjorie was so preoccupied these days, settling all her plans before she made the announcement to the household at Tuxbury, which would be a good deal like a sudden rattle of musketry in their midst, that she was, to some degree, oblivious of the presence of young Whitmarsh, or, if that is claiming too much, his society did not drive her into those desperate, antagonistic states which it had done not long before.

"She carried herself in just the way a woman should toward the man she had rejected," young Whitmarsh thought, with a bitter smile enough under the brown beard. Indeed, they got back to something which was a little like the old, friendly footing; just that, it never could be, with the memory of one evening in its white rapture of stars and moonlight between them; but they talked on one subject and another, sparkling up a little sometimes into the old jests, and yet wonderfully quiet and self-possessed all these days.

Yet one thing gave the girl a secret uneasiness all this time, and that was the moment when she must confide her plan to her cousins. It could not be put off much longer, for Marjorie could not take any active movement in the matter without first acquainting her relatives.

She knew perfectly well the dismay and disapproval with which her whole scheme was sure to be met.

Yet with her imperative necessity for action, when Marjorie's plans were once formed, she longed to set about their consummation, and it actually seemed to her she should feel much like a spent swimmer who just reaches the shore, when she at last got settled down in her home between the lakes at the foot of the Alps.

She had braced herself for any possible amount of logic, ridicule, and entreaties on the part of John and Eleanor, and had actually made up her mind to the disclosure next day, when Mr. Whitmarsh incidentally mentioned at supper that Dr. Avery had returned from his trip to Canada; he had shaken hands that very morning on the street with the old man, bluff and hearty as ever.

Now, all this time Marjorie Carruthers had been wishing for some friend to whose strong common sense and ripe judgment she could confide her plan. Not that anything in the world could swerve her from it, but she would like to perceive the impression which it made on a mind acute and judicious. Dr. Avery was just the right sort of man for a confidential adviser, and had turned up in precisely the nick of time. Miss Carruthers resolved to say nothing to her cousins until she had consulted the old physician.

The next morning Marjorie actually set off to walk the three miles which lay between the cottage and the old, square, gray-stone residence of Dr. Avery.

She found the gig at the gate, and was mounting the steps when the doctor came out, the sight of the stout, compact figure, the grizzled beard and hair and the kindly, heartsome face doing the girl good.

"Why, my child!" catching sight of the figure on the steps, "what has brought you here? Nothing bad, I hope?" and he put out both his hands.

Marjorie grasped them eagerly: —

"Oh, no, doctor; but I wanted to see you so much that I could not wait. If you are not going too far, and I shall not be in the way, take me with you."

"Not a bit in the way, Marjorie. Jump right in now. A half-a-dozen miles' drive will do you no hurt after this walk."

The two were soon bowling over the road in the doctor's comfortable gig. Of course there was no lack of matters to talk about. What with the doctor's taking the old pine wildernesses and mountains and rivers of Canada "by storm," as he called it, and "camping out" among their grand solitudes and beauty, and getting his old heart warm and fresh with the sap of its youth again, and what with Marjorie's accounts of the doings at Tuxbury during those weeks, they managed to keep up a brisk talk for the first hour.

All this time, however, Dr. Avery, with his kindly, shrewd eyes, had been watching Marjorie Carruthers' face; he watched it when it dropped out of the flush of animated talk into silence, — watched the sad, weary look that came about the mouth. "Something is wrong," he said to himself, and he felt certain some secret trouble had brought the girl over from Tuxbury that morning.

Still, he would not force her confidence, so he sat still, letting her take her own time. At last she looked up and met the kindly gaze. A smile came into her face, but it did not clear the underlying sadness. "What is the matter, my child?" he asked.

"You think there is something, then?"

"Oh, yes, I have been certain of it all along. Tell me."

Marjorie drew her breath, — the tears came into her eyes: "I have come to you, doctor, because you are the only friend in all the world to whom I can confide the trouble;" and there was something pleading and child-like in the way in which the beautiful woman said this, which must have touched a heart far less tender than the doctor's.

He took her hands in his as though she had been the lonely little child she seemed at that moment: "You can trust me, Marjorie."

And she did, plunging at once right into her plan of going abroad and settling down there; and although it seemed a wild-goose chase enough at first, still, as she proceeded to set all the details before him, this plan did not seem, on one side, visionary or unpractical. One thing was certain, Marjorie Carruthers was just as much at home under the Alps as she was in New England, and there was no valid reason, with the sole one of the separation it involved betwixt herself and Eleanor and her husband, that she should not live in Switzerland, if she preferred it to Tuxbury.

Dr. Avery, too, had a new estimate of Miss Carruthers' practical sagacity as she unfolded her plans. She had certainly displayed wonderful foresight in the sort of service she had as good as secured for her home across the sea. Berry Shumway would be just the honest, efficient, faithful little housemaid Miss Carruthers needed, while the factory-girl's own fortunes would be immensely improved; and as for her brother, Dr. Avery fancied, from his sister's account, that he would be precisely the sort of factotum for the young lady's purpose.

But all these facts, as he turned them over in his mind, by no means explained Miss Carruthers' eagerness to get away from Tuxbury. A desire for perfect independence and a home of her own, and all that, when she really had these with Mrs. Whitmarsh, and care and devotion into the bargain, furnished no sufficient solution of the problem. Dr. Avery remembered a look that he had seen one day on Miss Carruthers' face, and that had been to him an index to some secret beneath; indeed, the shrewd old man, who knew so much of human life, had pondered that look very often in his tramps up and down the Canada woods. There was something lying behind all these plans of Marjorie Carruthers which she had not told him. He saw that in her face, whenever it settled down into repose. It had grown thin and was weary and restless

When Dr. Avery spoke at last, it was wisely, considering the proud, sensitive nature with which he had to deal.

He did not treat her plan lightly; much less, he did not oppose it, but gave it a grave regard, and complimented Miss Carruthers on the good judgment which she had displayed in arranging all the complex details of her purpose; and then he went on to speak of the home at Tuxbury, and all the disappointment which the whole arrangement must encounter from the family there.

Marjorie frankly admitted and deplored the separation "from that darling Eleanor whom she loved with her whole heart. In fact, the leaving her, when it came to that, would cost Marjorie a terrible struggle, but for all that she must go,"— her voice low, the doctor noticed, the face deadly resolute as she uttered those last words.

"But," continued the doctor, choosing his words very carefully, "you have given me no sufficient reason for leaving them all thus suddenly and absolutely. I thought, Marjorie, that Tuxbury, it had come to be understood on all sides, was your home now, and that, since one night, a new tie bound you and the household together."

Marjorie started and winced, and for a moment the look in her face as she turned it on the doctor was like an animal driven to bay.

But his grave, frank eyes checked any vague suspicion which might have glanced across her; she burst out swiftly: "There is no bond of that sort between us. I would not stay under any roof a single hour if its inmates held me by no other tie than that of gratitude, although in the wide world I had no shelter beneath which to lay my head."

Then the doctor knew that he had touched the secret of this girl's desperate purpose to go abroad and leave them all. It was like her.

But no look betrayed the old man's thought. He even spoke to his chestnut mare, who was pricking up her ears a little at some object on the road: "There, Pluck, there! You and I won't show the white feather!" Then he replied quietly to Miss Carruthers: "But I should fancy that affection — such affection, for example, as yours and Mrs. Whitmarsh's — would only make the gratitude sweeter to be given and received. I have never found it hard to owe a debt to those whom I really loved, Miss Carruthers. God and his 'Unspeakable Gift,' have taught us something there."

She was silent, all the pride going out of her face now, and he drove on, leaving his own words to work what good they could with her, and his own face settling into a brown study.

Dr. Avery was in a dilemma, which perplexed even his shrewd sense when it came to seizing either horn. That Benjamin Whitmarsh was somehow at the bottom of this plan which Marjorie Carruthers had laid before him, he had not the shadow of a doubt. But, with all that, he had not sufficient data for any positive judgments. He was not sure of the real state of young Whitmarsh's affections, although, knowing what both the man and woman were, he was strongly inclined to suspect the facts in the case.

Still, although gravely doubting the wisdom of Miss Carruthers' present movement, he was not absolutely sure that she had not judged what was best for herself. The old man looked at the fair, proud, beautiful girl by his side, and his heart yearned over her like the heart of a wise and tender father.

The matter was one on which her whole future pivoted, — a mistake or a misapprehension here would be fatal, he reflected; and she, with her sensitive, tumultuous nature, was so very liable to err. He laid his hand on her arm: "Marjorie, you have given me a singular proof of your confidence, not only in my heart, but in my judgment," he said. "Grant me a still further one by promising that for two or three days, at least until I see you again, you will not make your contemplated disclosure to anybody."

Miss Carruthers hesitated: "I meant to tell Eleanor to-day, or, at farthest, to-morrow. It seems as though I could not rest until I had got over it, doctor. Besides, I have so little time to complete my arrangements. But — " glancing at his face — "yes, doctor, I promise you."

They had come in sight of the cottage after a three hours' talk.

When he had lifted the girl to the ground, the doctor turned suddenly and took her hand in his. "The blessing of an old man be upon you, my child!" he said, with a solemn fervor in his manner that struck her. "Be wise for yourself: remember you have a heart and a soul, and you will make their weal or woe. Good-by."

She did not see down into the depth of the old doctor's words, — he did not intend she should; but he meant they should abide with her, as words do sometimes, and Marjorie Carruthers went over them a good many times that day in her thoughts.

As for young Whitmarsh, during these two weeks which had elapsed since his return to Tuxbury, all his fine theories about rejected lovers had been submitted to a very thorough personal test, and he had discovered that the field for a man to prove his pluck in such cases was not in the daily presence of the woman who had refused him.

To do the young man justice, he struggled bravely; tried to throw himself, heart and soul, into business, and talked mines and mills with an energy that gave his brother a wonderful impression of Ben's latent business capacities; and then he tried books, settling himself down in the library among the old masters of Greek and English which used to delight his soul, but somehow the fire and the sap seemed to have died down in his old authors: the rustle of a woman's dress, the sound of her soft, clear voice, the shadow of her passing figure on threshold or window-sill, shook his strong nerves in the midst of business or books. He would find himself wondering what she was about, worrying himself over her long walks, and the slight wrappings with which the careless creature encountered the changes of the weather. He fretted himself, too, over what had struck Eleanor, — the change in Miss Carruthers' face: it had grown white and thin of late. Clearly, the girl was not well.

Dr. Avery, with his clear physician's eyes, had seen that also; but he had not so much as felt Miss Carruthers' pulse or made a prescription. He had doubts whether, in her case, the trouble did not lie beyond the reach of Peruvian bark and Port wine, in which Mrs. Whitmarsh had so much faith.

All these days you may be sure that Ben Whitmarsh did not spare himself. Restless, depressed, miserably athirst for change, and yet with that perpetual hankering for a woman's presence, it was dreadfully hard on this hitherto careless, independent, self-indulgent fellow.

With his pluck and his pride constantly at war with the love, mightier than either, in his heart, the man fairly cursed himself for a blundering fool, a spooney, a flaccid, love-sick sophomore. But curses did not help his case, as they never did anybody's.

He tried Miss Carruthers' fashion of long walks, tramping off by himself for miles into the deep woods; but Nature, like books and business, seemed to have grown utterly flat, stale, and unprofitable to him. In fact, the world itself was empty to him; sometimes he found himself wishing that he was out of it; life did not seem worth the living.

At the end of two weeks, Benjamin Whitmarsh girded himself up, looked the facts in the face, and settled it that things could go on in this shape no longer. I always respected the man for coming to that conclusion. It was the only sound one.

He had, like Marjorie Carruthers, a nature to which action was a necessity. The strain upon him was an unnatural one; and borne too long would have been the worse for him. Yet the pride of young Whitmarsh underwent a stinging sense of defeat, for he had put his fine theories to the test, and they had failed him. But as for living longer under the same roof with this woman, loving her only of all the world, hungering for her love in return, Ben Whitmarsh told himself it was not to be borne.

Why, a man, parched and dying on the edge of a desert, might as well linger in the sight of some green oasis, in the very sound of humming springs of cool water which he could not reach, as to linger here in the tantalizing sight and sound of Marjorie Carruthers.

Evidently, they two could not dwell under the same roof together. He had given the thing a fair trial and been worsted.

Now the only thing for him to do, was to get as far away from the woman as possible; the wrench which that thought cost him measuring the power of will which it would demand to take this final separation.

Once away from Marjorie, reasoned young Whitmarsh, he could probably regain his old self; near her, there was no hope of this.

A fierce hankering for the old nomad life, for wild, boundless spaces of land and sea, for horizons of desert or plain, for the old free, joyous, roving days, stung through him now as lion and leopard might be stung, tramping up and down the narrow limits of their cage.

There was no time to be lost. He must cut loose from Tuxbury and all the sweet torture of its associations without delay; and then came up the thought of John and Eleanor. He knew well enough what a lifelong disappointment this departure of his must be to them both; it seemed as though he were behaving like a selfish brute, but he must brave their pain and displeasure with the rest; half wishing in his despair and desperation that the ruffians had done their work that night only a little more satisfactorily, and thus settled all these ugly facts for him forever; and then he remembered that it was Miss Carruthers' fault; the villains had done their work perfectly enough.

When young Whitmarsh had once made up his mind to a course of action, it was not his nature to delay the consummation.

One morning, after a hurried knock at the door, Mrs. Whitmarsh burst suddenly into her cousin's room, — burst in, too, upon pretty visions of a Swiss cottage, with a wonderful background of mountains and lakes in the sunshine, like wide sheets of silver blossoms,—in the midst of all which that young lady's thoughts had been hovering for the last two hours.

Mrs. Whitmarsh sat down and burst into a passion of tears without speaking a single word.

"Why, Eleanor, what is the matter?" exclaimed her cousin, all her pretty visions swept off into chaos at sight of the other's distress.

"Ben is going off again. It seems as though it would break my heart," sobbed Mrs. Whitmarsh.

Marjorie actually grew pale to the lips.

"What do you mean, Eleanor dear?"

"It's just that; I can't tell what has got into the fellow; but he is immovable as a rock. John sat up nearly all night trying to argue him out of going. It's the cruellest disappointment, for he had set his heart on having Ben go into the Mills with him. But you might as well reason or plead with the winds. He's bent on going at once. I only learned it this morning after breakfast, and I've been trying to persuade him to stay with us, for the last two hours. John's cut to the quick, for Ben's all that's left him beside me and baby. I relied on having him with us always;" and the tender-hearted little woman choked and sobbed again.

As for Marjorie, she got up and walked the room, with a white, stunned face, much like one who has had a terrible blow; but Mrs. Whitmarsh was too much absorbed in her own troubles to notice anything singular in Marjorie's manner at this time.

"Where is he going — what is he going for?" stammered the latter.

"Oh, he says the fire and fever of the old roving life have waked up in his blood again, and that he must be off. I can see well enough that John's distress and mine hurts him terribly; but he insists that he should be good for nothing if he stayed, — a mere useless weight of nerves and muscles; he's tried, too, he affirms, to put himself into business, but it wouldn't work any more than it would with a wild savage; so he's made up his mind to set off for Europe, and perhaps for Asia; he doesn't know for how long. When the fever is cooled he shall come back again, but it may take years of roving and tramping to do that. I can see John just gives up his brother for anything like a settled, common-sense life, and it's only less hard to bear than his death would have been last winter;" and again the lady choked and sobbed.

As for Marjorie, the thing was like a thunder-clap to her. It broke right into the midst of her own cherished plans, for of course it would be simple outrage to talk of leaving Eleanor at this juncture.

She could not see her way clearly; and in her doubt and bewilderment walked the room, her face dark and pallid, and underneath some awful pain clutching at her heart-strings. Yet what was Benjamin Whitmarsh's going or coming to her, any further than so far as it interfered with her plans?

In this maze of perplexity and pain, Marjorie kept asking herself how she ought to act, — whether there was not something for her to do? She had grave doubts in her own mind whether a talk she and young Whitmarsh had together on that evening before he went to the seaside had not something to do with his going abroad.

Although of course he had no stronger feeling in the matter than a desire to do his utmost for the woman who had saved his life, still, men were proud, unreasonable creatures; he might have some feeling about remaining under the roof of the woman who had refused him.

If Marjorie were only certain that matter had anything to do with this absurb flight of his, she would at once announce her own intentions; but, after all, it might be as he said; the native savage instincts which he possessed in common with his sex might have developed into a habit, with Ben Whitmarsh, that he could not or would not surmount.

So Marjorie reasoned, pacing her room, not knowing how to act at this juncture, and Eleanor sobbed beside her, the former pitying her cousin with all her heart, and with a half-guilty feeling too, as though she was responsible for the distress into which the household was plunged. With all the rest, she was as angry as possible with young Whitmarsh for going off, regarded it as the absurdest, most unreasonable fool's chase in the world; never thinking that in the eyes of most sensible people it would not at all match her own for its general romantic, visionary, unpractical features.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THREE days had passed. They had been gloomy ones at the household of Tuxbury, although the family had tried to rally somewhat from the stunning effect which the announcement of Ben's projected departure had had upon everybody.

But for all that, the meals had passed off almost silently, despite young Whitmarsh's rather spasmodic attempts to treat the matter lightly, declaring himself spoiled for civilization and society, fit only for tent and wild horse, or at best a hammock upon the sea. John and Eleanor ought to be thankful they were about to get rid of such a savage.

But for all the jokes, the sight of his brother's and sister's faces at this time was more than Ben Whitmarsh could easily bear. The old tough family tie tugged at his heart-strings, and the misery he occasioned added to the general wretchedness of his mood at this time. As for Miss Carruthers and himself, one watching narrowly would have fancied that the two avoided each other these days.

Eleanor, absorbed with her own trouble, had quite ceased her anxieties over the mutual relations of the two people whom she loved so well. This was the end of all that rosy programme of honeymoons and wedding favors!

It just made the little woman sick to think of Ben's plunging off into the great world again, and he hardly well of that dreadful wound.

About Miss Carruthers' approval of his purpose, Ben Whitmarsh was quite uncertain. That young lady would probably be indifferent to the matter only so far as it concerned her cousin. No doubt, therefore, she would take Eleanor's view of the whole; and she might possibly think — a bitter smile at work under his beard — that it could not be altogether satisfactory to a discarded lover to live in such constant propinquity to the woman who had refused him.

But that young lady was certainly not to be envied at this time. Ever since she had learned of this anticipated departure of her cousin's brother-in-law, she had been as restless and wretched as possible. She fully agreed with Eleanor in all their talks over this "most unaccountable and reckless of freaks;" insisted that young Whitmarsh was by no means sufficiently recovered to make with impunity such demands on his strength. As for her own plans, of course nothing could be said or thought about these for the present.

So Miss Carruthers kept her room mostly, and spent her days, and sleepless nights also, in miserable brooding over young Whitmarsh's course, angry with him to a degree vastly disproportioned to his offence; in fact, one must be puzzled to say in what that consisted toward Miss Carruthers, while the unaccountable young woman was cold and silent as an iceberg in his presence. So the three days had ground all their heavy hours past, and Benjamin Whitmarsh was intending to leave the next morning on his wild-goose chase to the antipodes, as everybody regarded it.

The elder brother felt that he had done all that man could do; when arguments and entreaties failed he had tried reproaches, salt and bitter enough as he grew thoroughly angry. Ben took everything in good part. His patience, or indifference, or whatever it was, so unlike his easily-roused self, — for Ben had his share of the family temper, — quite amazed the elder. Whether Ben was morally, mentally, or physically diseased, his brother could not tell. At any rate there seemed nothing to do but to let him have his own way, wild and reckless as that seemed.

Everybody knew that the young man expected to leave on the following morning; but he looked forward with so much discomfort to the parting, and these last days had been so miserable, that he resolved that afternoon to end the whole thing at once. He would make some excuse for getting off that night, —it seemed as though every additional mile which stretched between him and Tuxbury would be so much weight off his soul.

So he had settled everything before he had come home that night, even to the ordering his trunks forwarded the next day.

He had requested them not to wait supper for him that night, and the meal was over, to his relief, and his brother was out and Eleanor upstairs with baby, when he came in.

Miss Carruthers had been fighting some dreadful pain all day. It had left her pale and exhausted to-night; and she went out in the grounds and seated herself upon a terrace facing a thick hedge,—below that, the garden with its flower-beds, and winding walks, and beautiful shrubberies.

It was a wonderful night in the first week of September. In the west the sun had just gone down in a blaze of splendor.

Marjorie thought of to-morrow and of what was to come, but it took her breath away; she vaguely wondered whether she should live through it.

In a few moments Ben Whitmarsh came along. He had found that less than an hour remained to him, and was taking a last walk through the grounds.

The man and woman were surprised enough to come upon each other here, but they went through their meeting creditably enough, exchanging a few remarks about the weather and the evening, and then Ben Whitmarsh marched on, leaving Marjorie alone on the terrace, facing the sunset.

As he walked on he reflected that the parting might as well be got through with now as any time. Then the hardest of all would be over before he went into the house to face his relatives.

So, in about five minutes, to the lady's surprise, young Whitmarsh returned and found her sitting there as he had left her. He would have noticed, at any other time, the utter weariness of her position, her head resting on her hand, and her eyes, full of some dumb pain, facing the sunset.

"Miss Carruthers," going at once to the point, "I have concluded to leave to-night, instead of to-morrow morning, and therefore I have come now to say good-by to you."

"To-night! to-night!" she gasped, looking him in the face, and it seemed as though she was trying to take in the meaning of his words.

"Yes," speaking very rapidly. "Partings are always insufferable things, and this one will be sufficiently painful to me. I want it over; so, if you please, we will say good-by here. I suppose you wish me a prosperous journey, Miss Carruthers?" and he gave her his hand.

She had risen up before this, but she stood as motionless as a sphinx. The hand she gave him was cold and benumbed.

"Good-by, Mr. Whitmarsh; I wish you a prosperous journey;" but the words seemed to drop cold and lifeless like hailstones from her lips; much as one might repeat a sentence after another, without attaching any meaning to it.

He held the soft, cold, numb hand one moment: "If at any time in the future there should come a chance for me to serve you, I need not say I shall be both ready and glad to do it, and I pray you to let me know, though we are as far apart as the world can make us."

"Yes," hardly above her breath; she knew what that meant,—that old, loathsome notion of gratitude; but she hardly felt angry then; only it seemed to her as though if she uttered another word it would have died in an awful shriek.

"Good-by, Marjorie Carruthers," and he dropped her hand and went on. So it was over!

At the end of the walk he turned and looked at her. There she stood just as he had left her,—she could not have stirred since,—the fine white profile, the eyes still turned to the west, something unutterably mournful and hopeless in the figure of the woman standing there, like one still and stunned with a mighty grief. In the tumult of his own anguish Ben Whitmarsh did not think that, but the sight of the still mournful figure half took from him his long self-control.

All the past, all the loss and misery of the present, rushed upon him, and, hardly conscious of what he was doing, this man went straight back, and standing still beside her, said to Marjorie Carruthers: "I would to God you had left me to die when they laid me before you that night, instead of dragging me back to life and this long misery, Marjorie Carruthers!—I would to God you had!" Then he turned and went away again.

A look of intensest amazement supplanted the dumb hopelessness in the woman's face. She put her hand to her forehead in a bewildered sort of way; she drew a swift breath or two, and moved forward a step toward the man's figure disappearing far up the twilight at the end of the walk, then drew back again doubtfully; and there were only the stars which had now begun to make glad the sky, and God over all, to see the bewilderment and anguish at work in the face of Marjorie Carruthers that moment.

"What did he mean?—what did he mean?" she muttered to herself; and afterward a flash of desperate resolve came into her white face and drove out every other expression in a breath. Benjamin Whitmarsh had just turned from the terrace-walk under the long arched roof of the grapery which led toward the house, when a woman's dress rustled beside him, and Marjorie Carruthers confronted him there in the arched walk, so dark with the shadows of the vines and the twilight that they could only see each other's faces.

"Benjamin Whitmarsh, you said just now that you wished I had left you to die when they laid you before me that night? What did you mean?" Her voice rapid and breathless, but something in it — I cannot tell what — that would have made you feel it was a question of life or death.

Ben Whitmarsh stood still: "I meant just what I said, Marjorie Carruthers. How can you ask me, knowing what passed between us one night not long ago?"

Her face white as ever, all its life in the dark splendor of the eyes on his face. "I do not see," — she spoke half to herself now, — "I cannot understand what all that had to do with wishing I had not done what I did to give back your life to you."

Benjamin Whitmarsh looked with his level gaze straight into the white face before him. I cannot tell whether there was more of pain or scorn in his voice as he answered: "Marjorie Carruthers, are you a woman, and ask me that question? I am a man, but you have taught me that my love, spurned and rejected, was more to me than my life, — than my life!"

She stood still, but you could not help knowing that some mighty convulsion shook her to the centre, and held back from her all power of speech; then her words dropped out slowly, one by one, as though each cost her a terrible effort: "That was not love; you know it as well as I; only gratitude. It was a cruel wrong you did me, Benjamin Whitmarsh!"

"Gratitude!" a sharp, quick laugh grated upon her ears. "Did you think that, — did you think that?" he cried suddenly. Then the next moment he had seized her arm and dragged her out from the black shadows into the light. He was the stronger of the two now; he looked at the proud woman with some stern scorn in his face that almost frightened her, brave as she was. "Marjorie!" he cried, "you saved my life, and out of my gratitude I would have given you mine, if need were, in return; but I would not have done either you or myself that foul injustice to ask you to be my wife because of any debt I owed you; not — God is my witness — though you had saved my life a dozen times over."

She swayed slowly with some inward storm, where she stood before him. She covered her face with her hands. "O my God — my God!" she cried, turning in that awful crisis of her weakness, when heart and soul failed her, when the light of the great truth broke upon her, and she saw where her pride, her folly, her rashness and mistake had driven her; and something of all she saw and felt was in that cry with which her human woman's heart turned now to the power and love mightier than herself.

That cry struck to the soul of Ben Whitmarsh, — bore down all the sternness and wrath which had wrought in him a moment before toward the woman of his love. He drew closer to her. In a moment he spoke: "If you had known, Marjorie, should you have answered me as you did?" and then his heart seemed to stand still, waiting for her answer.

There was a silence between these two; the low, soft crying of winds among the shrubberies around them, gathering the night dews. Then she turned toward him.

"Benjamin!" she said, "Benjamin!" It was a low cry, hardly above a whisper; but all through it throbbed the heart of Marjorie Carruthers, — its hunger and loneliness, the anguish that had been, the joy that was, the doubt and fear, and the tenderness quivering through all these; and again the winds cried softly in the shrubberies, gathering the night dews.

"Marjorie!" he said, "Marjorie!"

Then he put his arms around her and drew her to him.

In the library at the cottage at Tuxbury, Mr. and Mrs. Whitmarsh waited together.

It had been a miserable evening for both of them, and every minute seemed to grate slowly along its seconds, as they listened for the swift, ringing footfall which never came.

Ben was to leave early in the morning, and it did seem as though his absence at this juncture was adding insult to injury, — was, in short, the one drop which made the cup overflow.

The lady kept going to the window, and looking out as the darkness grew, and walking restlessly back and forth, with the tears coming into her eyes.

"I shall be glad when Ben is gone and it's all over," she said to her husband.

"So shall I, Eleanor."

Mrs. Whitmarsh had never known John take anything quite so much to heart as he had this matter of Ben's leaving them.

He sat now by the writing-table, playing sometimes nervously, with the sealing-wax or the paper-weights, but evidently without the faintest idea of what he was doing, his face gloomy as possible, muttering some of his thoughts out loud occasionally: "Fool! madness from beginning to end! Half a mind to throttle the fellow!" and things of that sort.

Mrs. Whitmarsh grew more indignant than ever with her brother-in-law, every time she looked at her husband. "John, you dear fellow, I do feel sorry for you. As for Ben, he's treated you shamefully," she said a dozen times, and she began to feel that she never wanted to set eyes on the obstinate, tantalizing fellow again. As for Miss Carruthers, her cousin fancied that young lady had gone up to her room after supper, and very likely would not show herself until the next morning.

She knew enough of Marjorie's imprudent drafts on her strength. One was, sitting up and reading, when the notion seized her, until long after midnight.

So the hours wore on. Mr. Whitmarsh went two or three times to the door, and looked up and down the road, — more as a kind of relief to his general feeling of uneasiness than with any real expectation of seeing his delinquent brother, while Mrs. Whitmarsh grew more explosive, as the night deepened, at her brother-in-law's absence.

"His conduct is most unbrotherly and ungrateful. It's not to be borne. If I were you, John, Ben should not go off without having one piece of my mind to carry across the ocean."

"I've given the scamp a good many already," he answered.

At last — it must have been nearly ten o'clock — the library door opened, and Ben Whitmarsh walked in, and there actually was Miss Carruthers leaning on his arm!

Mrs. Whitmarsh was struck dumb. She sat staring at her brother-in-law and her cousin, almost as though she had confronted two spectres from the grave; and as for her husband, the man was equally taken by surprise; he looked from one face to the other. "Ben — Marjorie, what does this mean?" he cried.

"It means, dear old fellow, that I have concluded to-night that I had better stay at home with you all!"

There was some half-repressed triumph in the tones, which each one felt.

Mrs. Whitmarsh rose up now; she went close to her cousin. The little lady held her breath, looking into that beautiful face, never so beautiful as now, with the new tenderness and joy that shone out of it, "until," as

Mrs. Whitmarsh afterward declared, "the sight almost frightened her."

"Marjorie! — Marjorie!" she stammered.

"Yes, Eleanor, he is going to stay, because he has learned to-night that I could not live without him;" her voice swaying along the words, but the unutterable joy holding every tone.

Mrs. Whitmarsh turned to her husband, fairly dazed with excess of feeling. "Are we awake, — you and I, John?" she asked.

"I think we are, my dear," the truth beginning slowly to dawn on him, — so marvellous a truth, so wholly unlooked for, that he was nearly as stunned as his wife.

Then Miss Carruthers spoke again; as frank and loyal in her love as she had been hard and cruel in her pride: —

"John — Eleanor, forgive me. In my pride and folly I had nearly driven him to the end of the world, and yet, if he had gone, I believe that I must have died."

Could it be Marjorie Carruthers who spoke those words, with such humility and with such exultation all through them?

Then Mrs. Whitmarsh understood. "O Ben — Marjorie!" she sobbed out, and the two women clung to each other.

"It is the happiest hour of my life, Marjorie. It is the one thing on which I had set my heart. I had dreamed, and hoped, and planned, and then I fancied it had all gone to the winds," laughed and cried the little woman, hugging first her brother-in-law and then her cousin.

"I never was so completely sold in my life!" exclaimed John Whitmarsh; hiding, after the manner of men, the depth of his feeling under a jest. "Ben and Marjorie, how did this come about?"

"It is such a long story to tell, dear John," said Marjorie; "but it was my fault — altogether mine."

"It was a misapprehension on both sides, and it had nearly proved fatal to both of us," said young Whitmarsh. "O John — Eleanor, I have loved her so long and so hopelessly, and now this great happiness has come before me so suddenly, I tremble lest I shall make a fool of myself."

"A fool of yourself before the woman you love, and Eleanor, and me, Ben!" said his brother, and there were actually tears in the strong man's eyes. "I wish you joy — I bless you both."

"So do I," added his wife. "Why, John, I don't believe I was any happier on the night you proposed to me!"

But of course, all that was said by these people in the library at Tuxbury would make my chapter endless; there was no sleep for them that night.

Marjorie Carruthers had a story to tell these, her best friends, and she did it, not sparing herself, nor the pride which had wrought so much anguish for herself, so much misery for others; and when Ben Whitmarsh would have come to her rescue, she would not let him.

"How much better God has been to me than I deserved, to answer me like this!" and her hand shaded the eyes which held great tears of joy; and while she spoke the gray cold dawn stole softly upon the white hill-tops of Tuxbury.

CHAPTER XIX.

Two or three wonderfully pleasant weeks have gone by under the low roof of the workman's dwelling in the settlement at Tuxbury.

As for Berry, she was as happy, all this time, as a bobolink on some summer morning, all dew and sunshine, sparkling and blossoming air. Night and day the child's heart and brain were busy with the home far beyond the sea, — the home under the great mountains in the green valleys beside the lakes. She fancied the purple waters glancing in the lights like vast sheets of violets. She thought of the beautiful lady, fair and gracious as a princess, with whom she was to dwell, and Berry's imagination — it was a little unsteady with mounting its sixteenth birthday, you must remember — grew with what it fed on, got a little intoxicated, and ran riot through this radiant paradise that stood shining and beckoning a little way off against her future as, alas! all our paradises do. To quote her own vivid summing up of her state of mind at this time, "She was so happy it was as much as she could do to sleep nights."

A wonderful change, too, had come over the young workman. He was quite himself again, Berry felt, fairly hugging herself with delight at that thought; had been indeed ever since the day that Berry had told him about Miss Carruthers' visit, and the secret project which that young lady was bent on carrying out with the help of this brother and sister.

Hardy had drunk in every word, with the astonishment growing wider and wider in his broad face, until it seemed as though, when she got through, the big, clumsy fellow was almost ready to take to frisking about the room for amazement and joy.

There was something half pathetic, half comic to Berry in her big brother's devotion to Miss Carruthers; only the girl herself was so devout a worshipper of that young woman that any amount of adoration at that shrine seemed hardly unnatural. Then Berry was not used to puzzling her bright wits over abstract mysteries and recondite matters in general. They busied themselves with the concrete and actual, and she was satisfied with the fact that Hardy entered into all her plans and fancies with an animation and eagerness which he had hardly shown in his life before,—certainly never since that dreadful last winter, which Berry, like the philosopher and Christian which she was, put resolutely behind her, saying to herself, "The summer has come, and the birds, and the flowers, and they don't any of them mind the snows and the storms of last winter; and so I won't mind my troubles either, but be glad and happy in the pleasant times that have come."

By a sort of tacit mutual consent, Hardy and she never talked of their troubles. Berry had an unexplained feeling that the subject would not bear touching. She had never quite forgotten the look in her brother's face when he left her at the door on that morning of his first return to the Furnace. It was not her temperament to dwell on the dark side of things; but still any association would easily recall that look to her remembrance, never without a kind of shiver and an uneasy half-consciousness that something lay behind the wild misery of that stare to which she had never penetrated.

Hardy Shumway was never much of a talker, but he really bore considerable share in the conversation that was constantly going on, at this time, over the castle in Spain, which had all of a sudden opened its shining front to these too. He was full of plans about what he was to do, and his brown moon-face would fire up as he said, "I'll do the best I can for her, Berry. Miss Carruthers couldn't a' found anybody who'll look out for her, and be ready to spend himself, heart and soul, for her happiness as I will. The work'll come easy, doin' it for her."

"That's just what I think, Hardy; one of her smiles will make it all like May; and won't I take pains and be real smart, and do my best for the dear, sweet, beautiful lady?"

When she went on in this style, Hardy would look at her with something in his eyes, — Berry could not tell what, and she settled it in her mind "that he always was a little queer; it was just his way." One thing she was certain,— he had never been so habitually kind and thoughtful of his little sister as he was these days.

After he had smoked his pipe at night, he would come into the house and sit down in his big chair near the window, and very soon after that Berry's lively little tongue loosened itself, for, of course, it kept Miss Carruthers' secret sacred, and that fact doubly enhanced the delight of the evening talk with Hardy; and how the big fellow would listen and enter into all her plans and laugh over her little jokes and sometimes help them along too, for he had a dry humor of his own; and sometimes Berry would draw up a little covered stool to his side and lean her head down on his knee, just as she used to when she was a little girl, after the mother died, and the child had a dumb sense of loss and lonely ache about her heart, and Hardy was the only thing in the world left her to love.

And at these times the fellow would lay his huge hand softly on her bright brown hair, and stroke it in his clumsy, tender way; and Berry would go on with her talk and plans and pretty visions, wondering how long it would be before Miss Carruthers could arrange all her matters and be ready to set about her journey; Berry not having the slightest doubt that whatever that young woman set herself to accomplish, she would bring speedily to pass, and Hardy partaking also of the same implicit confidence in Miss Carruthers' powers.

So both were content to wait; yet the gate-latch was never lifted, there was never a light tap at the door, that Berry Shumway's heart did not give a sudden jump.

All this was not singular when one reflects on the vital interest which this plan of Miss Carruthers had to the young workman and his sister,— what a change in their whole lives it involved,—a change of country, scenes, habits, language even.

One night, with her head on her brother's knee, and a little bustle of wind every few moments in the rose-bush outside the window, Berry said to him, "There's some things I shall feel bad about leaving here at Tuxbury, and a few folks—just a few, you know, Hardy."

"Who are they, Berry?" he said, and she felt the big fingers were awkwardly trying to smooth her soft hair.

"Well, there's Dr. Avery, you know; I shall remember him as long as I live; and sometimes I shall think it would do me good to see his dear, pleasant old face; he was our friend once, you know, Hardy," her voice dropping a little.

"Yes, I know; I shall never forget either, though I never said half-a-dozen words to him."

"Then there's some of the folks at the Mills; I always liked Jane Coyle, anyhow. It makes me feel curious, I can't jest tell how, but solemn-like, to think Jane and I, pretty soon, will never eat our lunches any more in the factory window, nor peep out in the big maple there, for the robin's nest."

"Yes, it does seem funny, Berry, to think of that. There are some good fellows among the hands, that I shall feel bad when it comes to saying good-by for the last time."

"Oh," said Berry; "I forgot to tell you, thinking of other things, that Jane Coyle told me to-day about old Blatchley. Have you heard it, Hardy?"

She felt him start and quiver all over. "No; what was it?"

"He's dead! drowned at sea. That ship went down and all on board!"

Hardy sprang to his feet as though he had been shot. It seemed to Berry that he staggered and steadied himself before he spoke; then he gasped out in a hoarse, thick, rapid voice, "Who told Jane Coyle? How did she know? Maybe it aint true."

"But I tell you it is true, Hardy, every word," answered Berry, stoutly, getting upon her feet too, a good deal startled by Hardy's manner. "Jane Coyle lent me the paper, and I read it myself. There was an awful storm, somewhere off the South American coast, and the vessel went to pieces, and every soul on board but two perished. You know Blatchley put up with Jane's uncle, and he had the paper, and that's the way she came by it."

Hardy stood still as a block, taking in every word, prompt and rapid along the clear, young voice, his eyes, with a fierce fire in them, seeming to devour the whole speech.

Then he tossed his head back suddenly, and a laugh — such a laugh as Berry had never heard from human lips before, and that made her heart stand still — burst out, loud and triumphant and awful, from Hardy's lips.

"Blatchley's drowned! old Blatchley is drowned!" he cried or shouted, as a man long hunted and harrowed by his mortal foe, might turn at last and shout, seeing the other lying dead before him.

"O Hardy, don't, don't speak like that!" Berry cried out sharply, as one would in deadly fright.

Hardy seized hold of the girl's shoulder. The man seemed quite beside himself. He rocked the small figure to and fro in his heavy gripe. His whole face seemed fairly to gloat with a greedy triumph over the one fact which had taken possession of him: "I tell you, Berry, he's lying away down there, stark and cold, where he can tell no tales. Old Blatchley's drowned!" and again that laugh, curdling Berry's very blood.

She shut her eyes. "You frighten me, Hardy. What is the matter?" she cried, a good deal as one might, waking out of some terrible dream.

That voice seemed to recall the man to himself a little. He let go his gripe, put his hand to his forehead in a bewildered way: "It took me all of a sudden, Berry. I don't know what I'm about;" and then again she heard him chuckling to himself, "Old Blatchley's dead, — he's dead!"

"But what makes you so glad, Hardy? It seems awful to rejoice like that over any human being's death. Did he have you in his power anyhow, Hardy?"

He answered her with a kind of wild, fierce stare at first. What lay behind all this strange manner and talk? Berry wondered. "What have I been sayin', Berry?" he asked, in a low, startled voice, and again his hand went up to his forehead in that bewildered, helpless way.

"You know what you've been saying, Hardy Shumway; and you've a'most frightened the sense out of me," with a touch of the native tartness which underlay all her warm heart and bright wits, and without which I doubt whether she could have been the efficient little soul and body she was. "I don't like such actions, anyhow."

"Don't mind me, Berry. The news took me by surprise, you know," speaking still a good deal like a man half stunned.

"I don't see," continued Berry, nervous and indignant with her fright, and a good deal inclined to sob outright, "as that is any reason why you should laugh like that, because a man's gone and got drowned. It's an awful thing, Hardy Shumway. I couldn't have the heart to rejoice over the death of my worst enemy; besides, that Blatchley was a bad man."

"A bad man; yes, he was a bad man; I know that," repeated Hardy, and it seemed as though he shuddered. "But he's where he can't do any more harm now."

"But it mayn't be any better for him, Hardy. It's a dreadful thing for a bad man to die, and go with all his wicked life, right to his God. It ought to make us feel worse than if he was a good man, and was sure of heaven."

Hardy stared at the honest little pleader a moment. The gloating and fierceness had gone out of his face, and in the dim candle-light on the table it seemed to Berry to grow dreadfully livid.

Then Hardy turned and walked up and down the room several times, with his heavy, shuffling tread, and he did not speak a word; and Berry heard outside the low swash of the winds among the rose-vines by the window.

At last the young man came over and stood by her side. "Berry," in a wistful voice, that still did not seem quite his own, "you won't mind what I said to-night. I didn't jest know how I was goin' on."

"I'm not angry with you now, Hardy, only you frightened me awful, and I don't know now what to make of it all."

"All what?" he asked, sharply and uneasily.

"Why, all your rejoicin' over that man's death. You know I never could bear him when he was alive; but I couldn't laugh over his going down, down, away off, under the sea."

"I couldn't help it, Berry: I didn't know, I tell you, jest what I was about. But I don't want Blatchley to have any trouble in the other world; God knows that."

"It wouldn't please him, though, to have you laugh in that way over such a thing; I know it wouldn't," face and voice very solemn.

"Well, Berry, I'll try not to laugh again, and maybe he sees it different from what you do. At any rate, if your God will give me a chance, I'll try to do the best I can, and make the most of it."

"*My* God!" said Berry, very much shocked. "Isn't he *your* God, too, Hardy?"

Hardy paused a moment: "I begin to feel a little as though he might be," speaking more to himself than his sister, — "as though, after all, he'd give me another chance."

"Another chance! What are you talkin' about, Hardy? Are you really goin' crazy?" coming close to him, and looking up anxiously in his face.

"No, child, no. Don't be worried; I say a good many things at random. It al'ays was my way, you know."

"I don't think it's a very good one, anyhow, to scare folks with such talk and actions," with considerable of asperity.

"I won't go on so any more. Old Blatchley's dead and buried in the sea, and we'll never speak of him again." Spite of himself there was a swell of exultation in Hardy Shumway's tones which he could not repress.

"He's nothing to us, and never was," said Berry, with a kind of vague feeling of uneasiness which she was not really conscious of, and yet she waited for Hardy's assent to her remark.

"No, that's true; he's nothing to us, nor to anybody else now, for that matter."

Berry drew a long sigh, rose up and shook herself, with a kind of feeling that some nightmare had been clinging to her. She went over to the table and snuffed the solitary candle, and the room was filled with fresh light. Then she came back and put her head out of the window. There was a faint, sweet breath of flowers in the night air, and overhead the stars, bright and calm in the autumn sky, and a young moon like a thick cluster of silver blossoms dropping slowly behind the mountains.

All these things steadied Berry's heart and nerves.

Then she heard the clock striking, and it was far beyond their usual bedtime.

She drew her head in at the window, and went to her brother, who was walking up and down the room again, as though some inward excitement kept him from sitting still.

"I won't mind it, Hardy," she said. "We won't talk about it any more;" and she pulled the broad face down to hers, and kissed it good-night, as she had, ever since her mother died, and she left him there walking back and forth until long after midnight.

All the while Berry had a feeling that some dreadful weight had been suddenly lifted off her brother's soul, and that Blatchley's death had something to do with it.

She fell several times to pondering how this could be, before she dropped asleep, and then thoughts of Miss Carruthers, and of the home to be, crowded out everything else. If it had not been for this absorbing subject, Berry might have pondered that matter of Blatchley's until she came to fear lest the man exercised some mysterious power over her brother's happiness.

Once possessed of such an idea, the girl's native energy would not have permitted her to pause without an effort to probe the thing to the bottom.

It is hardly possible, however, with all her shrewdness, that she would have got at the truth, whatever that might be, and Miss Carruthers, and the long journey, and the home at the end of it, shut out effectually anything more than a passing interest in other matters, from the mind of Berry Shumway.

CHAPTER XX.

THE days came and went just as they had always done over the household at Tuxbury, yet Benjamin Whitmarsh and Marjorie Carruthers could hardly realize that nothing outside of themselves had undergone any change. Air and sky and earth seemed filled to them with some divine joy and beauty. Life, which during the last summer had often seemed to this man and woman, with all the gifts and good fortune which made them the envy of their kind, so empty and dreary as to be an insufferable burden, now opened around them fair and spacious horizons of years.

I am not certain that to superficial observers, even to the very servants who saw them in every-day, household intimacy, there was any marked change in the man or woman of whom I am trying to tell you. Neither of them were of the billing-and-cooing type, and they had their old discussions and disagreements as before.

Yet not as before. Mr. and Mrs. Whitmarsh were conscious enough of the change in Marjorie. All the swift moods, the fiery unrest, were gone now, and a gentleness that was childlike and a humility that was touching had come in their stead, for Miss Carruthers was too proud not to be royal in her love. The great ache and hunger of her heart were gone now in the tidal overflow of its tenderness.

Once in a while she would come to Eleanor, and, throwing herself down on the ottoman at her cousin's feet, ask, half shyly, half doubtfully, "Am I the woman I was, Eleanor, a few days ago?"

"I think not, Marjorie," smiling and drawing the beautiful head into her lap.

"Because everything seems utterly changed. O Eleanor, those were dreadful days when I thought I must go and leave you all; and a little smoothed, raised line, by the side of uncle's grave, seemed the only thing left me to desire."

And she shuddered, and the slow tears came into her eyes, but the light dazzled through them as she said: —

"It is good to have something to live for but one's self."

"Yes, Marjorie, dear; oh, I can't tell you how I've waited and trembled and prayed for this time. It seemed hopeless though, and my heart utterly failed me. I knew you and Ben were, of all the world, just suited to each other, and I loved you better than anything but baby and his pa. Oh, dear! how near you both came to losing each other!"

"Yes;" and Marjorie slipped her hand into her cousin's. "There was only one moment between us. It was all my fault, — it was my wicked pride, Eleanor."

How humble and how penitent she looked saying those words! Eleanor, gazing at her, wondering if they were all gone forever, — the heats and the tempers and the swift bridling head. Then surely love had wrought its own miracle with the soul of Marjorie Carruthers.

Then, with its native genius for such things, Mrs. Whitmarsh's imagination loved to go flowering and trailing around Marjorie's future. Such a home as the young matron delighted to paint for her cousin, while the latter would listen, smiling and blushing, and always replying half dreamily, "I can't tell whether that will ever be, Eleanor; it seems a great way off, but I am content in the present."

"Oh, of course, that is all right now; but the rest will come naturally enough, Marjorie dear. John and I will see to all that. There must be humdrum people like us in the world, to do the practical side of life, or what would become of all the fine sentiment and poetry such as you and Ben are made of?

"I've the whole thing nicely laid down in the chart of my fancy. There is to be the most charming little villa not far from ours, for, of course, now it is quite settled that Ben will go into business with John. Indeed, I heard them talking it over last night, and Ben said the last drop of roving blood seemed somehow to have oozed out of him, and he supposed that he was anchored in this cove for his life — "

"Did he say that, Eleanor?" interrupted Marjorie, with a great deal of grave interest.

"Precisely. I think he is bent on putting his whole energies into business, and John is as happy over it as possible. It hurt him cruelly a little while ago to feel that he had lost his brother."

"I know it did. O Eleanor, how much trouble I have caused you!"

"Don't talk about that, dear; we are all so happy now!"

So the talk went between the maiden and the matron in those still, radiant autumn days which had come to round out the life of Marjorie Carruthers with peace and completeness; and sometimes the dog would come and thrust his cold nose into the soft palm, or the baby would thrust up his mesh of shining hair into her face.

Other talks Ben Whitmarsh and Marjorie Carruthers had, walking out together in the wide, green silences of wood and hill-side, or sitting in soft starlight by the open window, or pacing up and down that very veranda where one of them one night had paced alone; remembering that sometimes, too.

One evening, sitting by the window and watching the faint, gray wreaths of fog rising from the distant river, a sudden silence crept between the two, and grew, and they did not break it, at least, not for a long time. The man and woman, out of their fine sympathy, apprehended each other's moods.

At last, Benjamin Whitmarsh leaned forward and looked into the sweet, grave face opposite him.

It answered him with a smile, clear and content, and yet touched with a little sadness.

"Marjorie, do you know what John and Eleanor are busy planning for us, night and day? I doubt not they are absorbed over it this very moment."

"Yes, Benjamin, I know," the calm, clear sweet voice along the syllables.

"I leave it with them, Marjorie, because when I am with you I remember only that, and it suffices; but when we are apart, then my heart and thoughts go out to the future, to home,— warmth, and love, and peace; and you know who is the central figure there, and how impatient I must be for that time, when I have added to all the other dear names the sacred, crowning one."

She stirred a little, and then she said softly, "Benjamin!"

"Well, Marjorie!"

"I have something to say to you, — something which vitally concerns both of us, and fear lest I shall not say it wisely."

"The time has gone by for such fears between you and me, Marjorie."

"If I was less your friend; if I loved you less tenderly," — too proud and honest for any concealment or affectations then, — "I might not feel it so certainly my duty to warn you."

"To warn me, — from what, Marjorie?"

"From myself, Benjamin Whitmarsh! Are you not afraid to take me for your wife; ought I not at least to be afraid for you? There are the perpetual unrest and chafing of my moods,— the tumult, the reaction, the weakness of my inharmonious temperament. I should scorn to marry a man, not showing him the worst that is in me; and sometimes I doubt whether my love would be blessing or curse to one!"

"Marjorie Carruthers, do you wrong yourself and me like that?"

"Yet hear me again: You know what marriage is to most men and women in the world. If it were no more to me — to you in the end — the disappointment and the bitterness would be keener than death to me."

She paused a moment, letting her gaze go far out to the gray drifting of the fogs over the river; but he saw that she had not done speaking, and her eyes came back to him with an ineffable mournfulness and tenderness, and unconsciously to herself the thought at her heart dropped into rhythm on her lips: —

"'By the gladness of the girlhood
That has gone from me,
By this saddened womanhood
I must bring to thee,'

my soul must this hour deal fairly with yours, Benjamin Whitmarsh.

"If you still, after what I have shown you, persist in all you have said to-night — " Her voice shook here and failed her; she put her face down suddenly into her hands.

He drew them away: —

"Go on, Marjorie; it is your time now to speak and mine to listen."

The glory of her smile came out on her lips and seemed to steady their trembling, and Benjamin thought again, what the old woman had once said of Marjorie Carruthers' smile: "It seemed like an angel's."

"Where shall I find strength and steadiness to deny you? You took both from me in the unutterable joy of that moment when I found you loved me, — for no gratitude, but for myself, — for what I could be to you. If I was sure that I could be this always; that the new love had so strengthened and steadied me that it could bear the strain of all the future; the strain that warps and wears most loves of men and women, — then — " and again she paused, and the wind which that very night was hustling among the rose-leaves under Hardy Shumway's cottage window rioted among the beautiful shrubberies outside.

"Then?" repeated Benjamin Whitmarsh.

Marjorie leaned forward, and laid her hands in the young man's, and her voice held itself steadily through words hardly breathed above a whisper: "Then for life or for death, as I told you that night. Do with the rest as you will."

It had come his turn to speak now. He lifted her up and led her outside on the veranda, under the soft shining of the stars.

"I should like God to hear what I say now, as well as you, Marjorie; and it seems as though we were a little closer to him out here than in the house yonder."

"Yes," she said, softly.

He drew his arm around her.

"Marjorie," he said, "my life is henceforth in your life. Out of that the world has no happiness to offer me. To live with you, to love you and cherish you, — to have us both grow better and nobler in this mutual love and care, — is the one hope and purpose of my life. As for your faults, your moods, your tempers, your exactions, you have them; so have I mine, in a different way. Do you love me the less?"

An arch smile glanced across and unsettled the gravity of her lips.

"No, you dear fellow, I really believe I do not. Perhaps, on the whole, I like you a little better for them."

"Well, then, you have answered me. I only know that my love answers all your doubts and fears absolutely and triumphantly. Will you come to me?"

What her answer was you and I have no right to know. We have stood long enough on their love's holy ground.

Half an hour later they went to walk together through the grounds, he bringing out a shawl and wrapping it around her, telling her that, reckless as she had hitherto been of winds and of night dews, she must remember now that her health was of more consequence to him than anything in the world besides. She looked up at him with smiling eyes at that, and then they darkened and faltered with some memory.

"Uncle Hal used to say that to me sometimes," she replied; "but after he left me my health seemed of no consequence to anybody, — to myself even."

The whirling of winds among the leaves, the night air half choked with damp, sweet fragrance of blossoms, the fogs thickening and drifting to and fro on the distant river like restless spirits, made them silent a while; or perhaps it was their own happiness, the consciousness of what this mystery of love meant which had come to them both, filling with light and warmth the long loneliness of their souls; the thought of how singularly they were suited to, — of all they might be in the years to come to each other.

At last Marjorie said: "Benjamin, you spoke of God to-night."

"Yes; I have been thinking of him of late, of his character, and what he is to us, — Creator to created, Father to children, — as I never did before."

"So I have been thinking. It seems to me that any real love must draw us nearer to the great central Love"

"I have been thinking, too, what his love meant," continued Benjamin Whitmarsh. "It never struck me before; indeed I had dipped a good deal farther into Compte and Spinosa than I had into the Bible.

"But the other day there came suddenly across me some words out of that old Book which my mother used to read in my childhood, or, it may be, I have heard them in some sermon. I cannot tell where; but it seems they have lain long locked up in my memory, and these were the words: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' The words were like a new revelation to me, — this love of God freshly interpreted to my soul out of its love for you, Marjorie."

"Yes, I see that," she answered, softly.

"When one thinks, too, what sort of a world it was to which *he* came, Marjorie! You and I know something of that; how those old thousands of years are filled only with the tramping to and fro of evil. There were the wrecks of the old civilizations which had their day of power and splendor, and perished. The best religion, perhaps, which the world had ever attained, was the worship of the Beautiful, and we know what became of that a century and a half before he, the Son of man, God's unspeakable Gift, came to the world — a world full of hurtling evil, of all the strong energies of malice, of confusions and distractions and hatreds.

"Wherever men made them a home, there the green earth was sure to be harrowed by the red ploughshare of war; the brightest moral Ideal to which mankind had attained was that of Grecian æsthetics or Roman law. Charity, pity, forgiveness for wrong, had hardly so much as entered into the hearts of men; and yet, for all that, God so loved this dark, miserable, staggering, malice-drunken old world that he gave his Son to it, to live and to die for it."

For a long time she did not answer him. The winds whizzed softly among the leaves, and the solemn stars shone overhead. Her thoughts were busy within her. The Ideal after which this Marjorie Carruthers had been educated was not the Christ-Ideal. It was one of grace, refinement, culture; but really, she began to see it now, ending in nothing better than the old Greek self-development, — seeking the divine in art and beauty and humanity. This help for the sinning, this lifting the lonely, this work for mankind, was something new to her. Life took on new meanings to her. How much of her own had been a mistake, after all!

At last she spoke: "That Ideal makes one's living a terribly earnest thing. How beside it a life of mere personal development, cultivation, refined enjoyment, shrinks into one of essential selfishness! It gives you and me some work to do for humanity, Benjamin."

"Yes; some work wherever we may be," he answered.

She looked up in his face with a smile: "There is no lack of a field here in Tuxbury, among all these poor, ignorant, degraded workmen."

"Yes; I almost feel at this moment, Marjorie, as though God had set you and me here, saying, 'This is your vineyard; work in it;' but I cannot tell how long I shall hear the call, if it be of God. The voices of the world will rise up and drown it, or I shall forget it in my own indolence, selfishness, love of pleasure of one sort and another. O Marjorie, you must help me."

"That is precisely what I was going to say to you."

"Well then, we will help each other," closing his hand over the soft, white one which lay on his arm.

A little later they went into the house, and found Mr. and Mrs. Whitmarsh in the library.

"I concluded you'd made up your minds to walk until dawn," said the lady, glancing at the clock, which already had crossed the meridian of night. "When John and I were in your condition, we were very oblivious of time, I remember, and we were not romantic people, like you, Ben and Marjorie."

Mrs. Whitmarsh did not often venture on jests with the lovers, having a feeling that her cousin might not just relish the stale commonplaces of the occasion; but the present afforded too good an opportunity to be lost.

"John and you, Eleanor, are the good spirits which take from us all care of practical things, and leave to Marjorie and me the poetical, enchanted side of life," answered young Whitmarsh.

"You may well say that, Ben," with that bright tartness in her tones which gave such a pretty animation to the talk of Eleanor Whitmarsh. "I can't possibly beguile Marjorie into talking about her future home, or impress upon her any more sense of the duties and responsibilities of house-keeping than I could upon baby. She fancies all those things follow general rules, and that coffee and muffins are as certainly to be depended on at breakfast-time as is the law of gravitation."

Everybody laughed. Marjorie thought of her late project of a home in Switzerland, and fancied that if Eleanor knew precisely how she had planned and arranged all the details, and intended to consummate them too, without any further assistance than a maid and man from the Mills, Mrs. Whitmarsh would not be so confident about her cousin's fatal lack of practicality.

She answered the rallying tone with a laugh: "Well, Eleanor, I intend to place myself under your instructions from this hour. You shall find, though I have sat so long at my feast among the dews and the daisies, I am not spoiled for the practical side of life. Indeed, I begin to see that is, in a wide sense, the noblest of all. I shall prove to you there are some latent forces in me which you little suspect."

"I don't doubt that. You have proved that once, Marjorie."

Mrs. Whitmarsh spoke before she was aware, and to herself more than to her cousin, as that night flashed across the lady's memory which had proved the strength of Marjorie Carruthers in the face of the weakness of all the others.

"How could I be so stupid!" thought the lady, looking blank enough for one moment.

But Ben and Marjorie only glanced at each other.

"Oh, there you are!" shouted the bluff, pleasant voice of the doctor next morning. "I'm after you, Marjorie."

She sprang up in a hurry, scattering the dews from a cluster of dahlias and chrysanthemums which she held in her hand, her whole face sparkling with brightness, the pruning-shears dropping to the ground.

"O Dr. Avery, I'm glad to see you!" she said.

No need to tell him that twice with those eyes.

"I've been after you for the last three or four days," he said; "but it was no use. They've had a tug with typhus and typhoid down among the factory-people, and I had to be on hand to see that it didn't get the mastery. We've conquered the giant in the hardest cases, and so this morning brought me leave of absence, and I drew a long breath, and started off for you."

"Ah, doctor, you are really living for some purpose in the world," looking at the keen, hearty face, and thinking of some talk last night among the shrubberies, talk which had wonderfully shaken all her previous conceptions of any true living.

The doctor looked at her in turn with his shrewd, penetrating eyes: —

"I came over here to have a talk with you, where we left off the other day."

"Oh, yes, that seems so long ago," answered Marjorie, remembering all that had come between. "We will go up into the arbor."

They went up the terrace-steps together. It was a warm, hushed autumn morning, beautiful in its kind, — one wide cloud, like a soft, light-gray plush, covering the whole sky, a lazy quiver of winds among the leaves.

"How beautiful it is to-day!" said Marjorie, looking around, her wide, brown eyes radiant with enjoyment.

"Yes; this kind of morning was one of my favorites, even in my youth, and I have learned to enter deeper into its spirit of brooding hush and peace as I grow older. I always seem to hear singing softly through such moments a psalm of peace and content, with which one, after a well-spent life, might draw closer to the grave."

"A well-spent life!" repeated Marjorie, and it drifted across her how her Uncle Hal would never have used those words. He talked often of a life of fine culture, of a grand, heroic career; and thinking these thoughts as she walked along by the doctor's side, she unconsciously arranged the flowers in her hands, the white chrysanthemums among the burning dahlias like snowflakes scattered among fire.

They reached the wide, roofless arbor. The doctor sat down on one of the iron benches, and Marjorie brought a stool to his feet and looked up in his face, much like a child into a tender father's.

"What has happened to you, my dear?" he asked.

"Something good, doctor, — good beyond all my hopes or dreams," she said, softly, and then a flush entered suddenly into her whole face.

"I saw that with my first glance into your eyes, Marjorie."

"Doctor," her words still hovering around the truth, "I am not going abroad."

"I fancied not;" and a shrewd twinkle came into the old man's eyes. Marjorie started, and her cheeks burned deeper than before. Of a sudden she asked: —

"Has anybody been telling you?"

"Not a soul."

"But you know something. I see that in your eyes."

"I know nothing, Marjorie; but I have a suspicion that there is a man at this sudden change in that project of yours, about settling down under the Alps. I've been turning it over in my mind day and night, and I've come primed to talk it on all sides this morning."

"You are very good, doctor, and you are right," answered the girl, and her cheeks rivalled at that moment the crimson at the heart of the dahlias in her lap.

"And the name of this man is — Have I your leave to say it first, Marjorie?"

"Yes."

"Benjamin Whitmarsh."

She put her hand in the old doctor's for answer.

Afterward they talked freely enough together.

"But how did you know, — how did you come to suspect?" Marjorie persisted in questioning.

"Ah, Marjorie, you guarded your secret like a proud woman; but that day we rode together I looked into your face, and something of the pain and weariness there, set me to thinking. I was not certain, of course; but afterward, when you sprang and winced so at the mere mention of gratitude, my suspicions settled down into stubborn convictions."

The tears came into the girl's eyes.

"O doctor," she said, "I see now what a blind, weak, proud, passionate fool I have been!"

The doctor took her hands in his.

"I should not let anybody else slander you like that, my child," he said.

After the ice was once broken, they sat there together and talked for an hour at least, in the wide, roofless walk, and the plush of gray clouds above them.

At the end of that time Ben Whitmarsh broke in suddenly upon them: —

"Ah, Marjorie!" and then catching sight of the doctor: "My dear sir, I'm heartily glad to see you;" and the old man and the young one grasped hands.

"My dear fellow, I'm glad to congratulate you from my heart."

"Then I see you know all," bowing and smiling toward Marjorie.

"He knew it all before I told him," laughing and crimsoning again.

"I never should, though, if it had not been for that Interlachen project," answered the doctor, who was never eager for compliments to his penetration.

"Interlachen project!" repeated Ben Whitmarsh. "What does he mean, Marjorie?"

She laughed that laugh sweeter than the tickling of winds among flowers. "You've let the bird out of the cage now, doctor!"

"What! didn't he know?" asked Dr. Avery.

"Not a word."

"But he means to, now," added Ben Whitmarsh, very decidedly, taking a seat.

"I had rather you should tell him, doctor," said Marjorie, at last.

So the doctor told the story of Marjorie's pretty project of the home across the sea.

He commenced sportively enough; but somehow the whole three grew grave before he got through.

Marjorie, too, related her visit to Berry Shumway, and how she had quite turned the child's head with all the new plans.

"I haven't thought of her of late," she said; "but I've no doubt all those pretty visions have been shining and buzzing in her brain ever since. It will be a severe disappointment to her when they all come to be scattered, as well as to that big brother, no doubt. I must find some way of making this up to them."

"I'll try and help you, Marjorie," answered Ben Whitmarsh, "for the sake of my little friend. I've always intended to see her again, but have never come across her since our first meeting on the roadside."

More of this talk followed; half grave, half gay; and at last the doctor looked at his watch, and reluctantly rose up, saying it was long past time for him to leave.

He took both their hands in his: —

"My heart is with you in your great joy. The Lord bless you, my children!"

They followed him to the gate, and stood watching the old chaise as it swept up the road.

"A good man is inside there, — a grand, noble man," exclaimed Marjorie, at last.

"Yes, and we know after what Ideal he strives to shape his life," replied young Whitmarsh.

"Yes, we know," she answered, softly.

After a while he turned and looked at her: "Ah, Marjorie, with what wonderful sagacity you had laid out all that plan of yours! I'd like to hear what Eleanor would have to say to your practicality now. However, all the time I was listening, the sagacity did not strike me so much as something else."

"What was that?"

"It was how very near the whole thing came to success. One moment only stood between you and me, Marjorie."

Her face shook all over. She laid her hand on his arm.

"O Benjamin, thank God!" she said.

"Yes, thank God, Marjorie!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"HARDY," said Berry Shumway, hurrying in from the front yard one morning, her hands filled with a wet, dazzling heap of colors, — great crimson dahlias, and golden marigolds, and flaming shafts of gladiolus, — "do you see?" holding up close to his face the dew, and color, and perfume.

"Yes, it's putty," placing the tin box which contained the dinner he was to carry that day to the Mills on the mantel, and he surveyed the bright, wet mass with a twinkle of admiration. "You've made a fine haul this time."

"Yes; it's wonderful how these dahlias and gladiolus have come out this last week. I tell you, Hardy, I'll show you some flower-pots when you come home to-night that will be worth looking at;" and she laid down her bouquet on the table among a green, feathery pile of asparagus heads.

Then she turned quickly: "Did you get the gingerbread, Hardy? I put some nice slices of corn-beef between the biscuit. They make such a nice relish, you know."

"Yes; I've put 'm up all right;" lighting his inevitable pipe, always his last preparatory work before starting for the Mills.

"It's such a nice morning," said Berry, with her swift, brown little fingers stripping off the wet, dead leaves from the flowers, "I just feel as though I must keep out doors, like the birds and squirrels. I envy 'em that they don't have anything to do but have a good time out in the woods such weather as this."

"You may have as good a time as they," said Hardy, after a trial whiff or two at his pipe. "Why don't you jest lock up and go off for the day, and have a high old time in the woods? It'll do you good."

Berry's eyes danced as she turned them to her brother: "That's a bright idea, Hardy. I've a real mind to go over to Cherry Bend after wild plums. They must be ripe by this time, and they make such nice preserves for winter. Oh, I forgot!" catching her breath suddenly.

"Forgot what?" asked Hardy.

"Why, that 'taint likely you and I will be here next winter."

"No," said Hardy, with a slight doubt in his tones. "You don't s'pose that Miss Carruthers would change her mind now, do you, Berry? We've been a good while hearin' from her, you know."

"She aint the person to change her mind when once she's made it up; you may depend on that, Hardy Shumway," answered Berry, with so decided a sweep of her arm that she scattered a heap of leaves upon the carpet. "Oh, dear! see there, Hardy, what you've made me do!" a good deal nettled with him that he should have ventured to suggest a possibility of Miss Carruthers changing her mind; but she was down on the floor picking up the débris in a moment. "As though it didn't take a great while to get all things in shape for such a journey."

"Yes, folks have to move slower than they'd like, sometimes," replied Hardy, trying to satisfy himself with this general reflection, for the anticipated journey had taken as strong possession of his imagination as it had of his sister's.

"I have a feelin', too," said Berry, as she got up, her apron holding the leaves, "that somethin's goin' to happen pretty soon. I can't tell what, nor how I know, only I jest feel it, and I think it's because Miss Carruthers is coming. Who knows but what it may be this very day? I won't go off into the woods, Hardy, come to think, for I may miss her, and that would be so dreadful."

Hardy had a profound respect for the girl's prescience. How little she guessed with what soft, strong fibres of love she held the soul of the big, coarse man!

"Well," he said, "I'll leave the goin' with you, for I must be off; only, Berry," pausing at the door with the latch in his hand, "I've filled the pail to the brim. Don't you go to tryin' that well-rope to-day. It's too hard for little folks' arms, afore I've mended it."

She looked up, touched with this proof of his care, and with, perhaps, a faint compunction that she had not been just pleasant to him a moment before. She had pretty, sudden ways of doing things, half-girlish, half-womanish, that were a part of herself, as much as the soft, sweet perfume of the pansies lying there on the table were a part of themselves, — bright, simple ways that, I think, a man loves, whether his nature be elevated and ideal or coarse and uncultured.

There was a double yellow chrysanthemum lying on the table, the first on the bush this season.

Berry intended it should be the central star of her bouquet. She caught it up now, her choicest flower, and ran to her brother: "Stop one moment, Hardy; I want to put this in your button-hole. It's my first chrysanthemum, jest like a great yellow rose, and you shall have it."

It was a picture that the sunshine had all to itself, — the big man standing there in the door-way, with his pipe held carefully behind him, so that its fumes should not sicken her, while the girl fastened the flower in the button-hole of his shaggy blue coat. As he stood there something soft and tender came into young Shumway's broad, heavy face, — something which belonged to the better side of the workman's nature. You felt that he would look at the flower a good many times during the day, and that it would have some meaning for him.

The bright morning light shook in the girl's brown hair as she bent her head to bite off the ends of the stem, and looked up in his face with a smile, saying, "There, now, Hardy, you great, big fellow, you've got my prettiest flower; but I don't begrudge it to you."

"I know that, Berry. You're a good girl;" a soft, pleased smile unlocking his jaws, and he bent down suddenly and kissed her cheek, and went away; and Berry Shumway stood in the door and watched the large, familiar figure tramping up the road; and there was a pleasant shining in her eyes and about her lips as she looked away off to the hills that autumn morning, with the bright light and the faint blue mists upon them. She was very happy; a pleasant day always made her so, but Berry Shumway will never forget — never to the latest hour of her life — how she stood in the door that morning and watched Hardy go up the road, after he had left her with that last smile upon his lips. She went back to her household work, for this was one of her house days, and a bustling activity came naturally enough to Berry Shumway; and she hummed bits of old tunes, and wondered whether Miss Carruthers would not let her keep a canary when they got settled down in the new, beautiful home so far away; and every little while she would pause and listen for the gate-latch, with the feeling that something was about to happen. She never once feared lest it should not be good.

Something *was* about to happen. Alas for thee, poor little Berry Shumway!

CHAPTER XXII.

THAT very morning, less than a couple of hours after Berry Shumway had watched her brother disappear up the factory-road, John Whitmarsh came back suddenly as he was leaving the house, at the conclusion of a long business talk with his brother, saying, "There's a fresh chance for promotion, Ben. One of our foremen is going out West. Got any favorite of the right sort among the hands to whom you'd like to do a kindness?"

Marjorie Carruthers coming up the walk at that moment heard the question. Only the night before she had been talking of the Shumways with Ben Whitmarsh, with a sense that she owed something to the brother and sister after all the fine promises she had failed to fulfil; chiding herself, too, because the long absorbance in her own happiness had fairly driven them out of her thoughts, and her silence would be sure to look to the workman and his sister like indifference or neglect. So Benjamin Whitmarsh had said to Marjorie, "If you could make those people useful in one home, why can't you equally so in another?"

The girl laughed: "That is much like a man's reasoning when he comes to talk of household affairs. As for Berry, I can conceive her being just as serviceable in one place as another, with all these bright, helpful ways; but when it comes to her big brother, I can't see what earthly use I can make of him."

"I can, though. One of these days, it is to be hoped, you and I will be domiciled in a home of our own, in the midst of grounds with arbors, and shrubberies, and avenues, and what not, sufficient at least to keep busy one man of brawny muscles and shrewd brain, steady, industrious, and understanding his work. Now, if this young Shumway is made of this sort of stuff, we will find a permanent place for him, and make it worth his while to accept it."

Marjorie reflected a moment: "That strikes me as a capital settlement of the difficulty. I never could have untied the knot without your help, Ben. You have slipped those people very smoothly around what I feared must be the sharp corner of their disappointment. Only — "

"Only what?" he asked, for Marjorie had paused, with a faint smile about her lips, and a faint color in her cheeks.

"It will come very awkwardly to me to go over there and make all the necessary explanations to that little, bright, eager face; and it would come doubly hard if the big brother should happen to be at home. Yet I owe them the explanation. I see now I was in too great a hurry one day."

"And because you have grace enough to own that, Marjorie, I'll go over and help you out with the awkward explanations;" an amused twinkle in his eyes. "Besides that, I want to see my brave little friend again. I haven't come on her, you know, since our first meeting that day by the roadside."

So it was settled that night, betwixt the two, that they should drive over to the Settlement within a few days. But the next morning, coming up the walk, and hearing her cousin's question to her brother, Marjorie Carruthers paused on the lowest step of the porch, and heard young Whitmarsh reply, "I can't think, John, of anybody among the hands, at this moment, whom I especially desire to serve."

"Well, then, I'll fix it all," lifting his hat to Marjorie as he was about to start off.

A sudden thought struck the girl. "Stay, John," she said; "I really wish you'd let me make a suggestion in this matter, as Ben has declined it."

"With all my heart, Marjorie; but what in the world do you know about mill-hands and matters?"

"Precious little. Yet there is one whom I should like to see promoted to this vacant office of foreman, provided he has, as you say, the qualifications for the position."

"Who in the world is he, Marjorie?" inquired the gentleman, a good deal surprised and amused.

"Hardy Shumway."

"Oh, I never thought of that fellow!" exclaimed Benjamin Whitmarsh, who had thus far been listening silently to the talk. "It's singular I never come upon him in any of my tours through the work-rooms."

"Well, Marjorie, I will talk the matter over with some of the officers, and let you know this evening. The fellow shall have the place if he is competent to it, and I see no reason why he is not."

"You've settled it, Marjorie," said the younger Whitmarsh as his brother went down the walk, and afterward the two arranged a drive over to the Settlement that very evening to communicate the good news of Hardy Shumway's promotion.

Marjorie Carruthers was a venturesome creature. The day was one in which it was impossible, to use her own words, for people to stay in-doors, and in the early afternoon she went out by herself, Eleanor being engaged inside with company, and the gentlemen having business which took them over to the mines after dinner. The girl had no especial object in view when she started from the door, beyond enjoying the sunshine, the earth, and the delicious air of the day. She went down the road in a half-dreamy mood, and was quite surprised at last at finding herself close to the back of the great iron Furnace buildings.

Some unaccountable fancy seized Miss Carruthers to enter inside. She had been thinking lately of the men and women employed in these vast workshops, with some new interest, — some feeling that between her and them were tough bonds of humanity; and, with all her culture and fastidiousness, she had a new desire to be brought in contact with the hard, grimy workmen, — with the coarse, toiling women, — to get closer into their lives and feelings, and to reach down, if it might be, her white, unsoiled hands, and help some of these souls of men and women out of the murk and drudgery where they dwelt, to higher and fairer levels.

So, all alone, Marjorie Carruthers entered the workshops, and amid the busy, sweating, moiling hive, amid the dust, and grime, and din shone again like an angel's the fine, rare, delicate beauty of her face.

She stopped often, watching the work and speaking to one and another among the squads of men. Certainly nothing she said that day would be worth putting in a book, and yet there was hardly one of the hands who did not go over to his wife and children that evening every word that the lady with the beautiful face had said to him, and more than one affirmed the smile was as bright in her eyes as on her lips while she talked. Marjorie had a fancy to make the circuit of the buildings by herself this afternoon, and she consequently kept as far as possible from the office, where she would have been certain of finding plenty of escorts, and the pleased, half-awestruck, wondering faces of the workmen followed her wherever she moved through the long, dark passages and up the stairs into the upper galleries. At last she reached the top of the main tower, — a large, circular kind of room, in the centre of which a vast fire was always blazing, and the din of the heavy wheelbarrows of coal dumped on the stones, the shouts of the workmen to those below, the creaking of rusty hinges, the lurid light of the flames on the sooty faces of the men, the coal-dust blackening the walls and windows, made this main tower the noisiest, hottest portion of the vast Iron Mills.

From the great height, however, there was a view which well repaid one for the ascent: the wide landscape gathered in the distant mountains, the nearer green slopes of the hills, the vast reaches of meadows, the blue glitter of summer streams, and the black masses of forests, and solitary farm-houses with gray loops of smoke lazily drifting out of ancient, wide-mouthed chimneys, with here and there a white group of houses comfortably nestled together.

For the next hour Marjorie forgot everything but the landscape, going from one open window to another, watching from her different stand-points the picturesque effects in the soft, clear atmosphere of the day. At last she drew her breath, smiling a little to herself, as she wondered what Ben would say to see her mounted up there all alone among the workmen, who stared at her, blank amazement distending their eyes and mouths.

A new squad of workmen had just mounted on the elevator, to relieve the hands which had been for the last three hours on "tower duty," to use the vernacular of the Mills.

Marjorie Carruthers was utterly fearless; and it struck her now that she might accomplish the descent by the same means that the wheelbarrows and hands did theirs, thus saving herself going down the long, narrow, dusty staircases by which she had achieved her present elevation.

She stepped forward and addressed the foremost of the newly arrived party, while his comrades piled themselves into the elevator: "How soon will this return again?"

"It'll be back in two minutes, ma'am, with the coal," replied the man.

"And I can go down on it, and save my feet that long, dark, uncomfortable descent?" asked Miss Carruthers.

"Oh, yes, ma'am; only it don't seem the place, exactly, for a lady."

"Yes, it does, if she has the nerve to try it," answered Marjorie, with her sweet, fearless smile, which shone radiant in the listener's eyes.

Marjorie's did not take in the whole group. If they had, she would have seen one man, a little behind the others, who had started and flushed at the first sound of her voice, and then turned, and with his big, light eyes, drank in her whole face, — something in them that was in no other of that group of gazers; something awe-struck, reverent, worshipful.

But, as the girl stood and waited, her gaze went again out of the opposite window to the landscape, and it seemed a pity there was no artist at the moment to see the whole grouping, — the fair, delicate, high-bred profile in the midst of the group of bronze, brawny figures, and the great furnace-fire behind with its livid flames, like waving torchlights across the whole.

In a few moments the elevator rose, shaking the heavy beams and masonry as it landed at the top with its load.

Only the day before one of the overseers of that department of the works, surveying the elevator, had said to himself, "It's about time to renew the ropes. I'll see it's done to-morrow."

The next day, however, the man had been summoned away, and, as the great cable appeared to be still in perfectly sound condition, he gave no orders for any change before his return.

The men stood aside, and Marjorie Carruthers took her place on the elevator. So fair a burden had never rested before on the great, black flooring. Some lurking knighthood at the bottom of the coarse, hard souls of the men made them feel that the lady ought not to make the descent alone; but she looked so white, and pure, and fearless, that no one had the courage to offer to accompany her.

The girl gathered her shawl around her, and, turning, smiled her readiness to descend. The signal was given, the cable had just commenced uncoiling, when suddenly there was a sharp, crackling sound that made the nerves of every one of that group of men quiver as though a rattling volley of musketry had been fired into their midst; and with a yell which seemed to tear itself out of some unutterable anguish in his soul, and which even in that awful moment struck the dazed hearers, the man whose big, light eyes all this time had never once turned their gaze from Marjorie Carruthers, plunged forward.

It was all done in a moment; swift as lightning or the leap and crash from mountain to valley of a hurricane, the workman was on the elevator. Marjorie Carruthers was never able to recall any sense of impending danger at that time; but she was conscious of being caught fiercely and hurled up in the twinkling of an eye upon the tower floor, — hurled so swiftly that none of the strong arms involuntarily stretched out could seize her; and she lay white and bewildered, and a good deal bruised among the dust and débris, and for a little while nobody took any notice of her.

Some of the group of stark, pallid men affirmed long afterward that the workman had made one desperate leap at the stationary beams over his head, but it was too late; there was another sharp, crackling sound, and a moment later, an awful crash, which seemed to shake the mighty building to its foundations; and it flashed through Marjorie Carruthers that the whole structure had given way, and that the great tower was crashing down around her, and that they would all be buried under its ruins; and then, — she was not a woman given to fainting, but she must have swooned off for a few moments into unconsciousness.

For a few moments only, for not a soul of that group of men had turned to her when she opened her eyes, and saw the operatives huddled together with their hushed, pallid faces.

It was evident something awful had happened. Marjorie gasped for breath, and tried to raise herself up, but her head was dizzy and fell back.

One of the workmen caught sight of the girl then, and came over to her at once, and tried to lift up her head, but his hands shook so that he did it awkwardly enough.

Then one and another came and stood by her, and looked at her with strained, shocked eyes.

"Are you hurt, ma'am?" more than one voice asked, kindly enough, the words creeping out of white lips.

"I don't know. Tell me what has happened," answered Marjorie, sitting up, and finding herself shaking like a leaf.

The men looked at each other with blank, helpless faces. Several of their number had already gone below. "Tell me," said Marjorie, with that half-appealing, half-imperative air which men of stronger moral fibre than the mill-hands would have found it hard to resist.

"The cable's broke," cried more than one voice.

Even then she did not comprehend.

"The cable has broken," she repeated slowly, trying to gather in the meaning of the words.

"Yes, ma'am; the elevator's gone down," somebody answered.

Then, in a moment, it all flashed upon her. Somebody had seized hold of her in that one last moment of her deadly peril, and wrenched her off and hurled her back upon the tower floor. She knew now why she was lying there.

The girl was on her feet in an instant. "Did anybody go down?" she cried, her voice sharp with an awful agony of fear.

And again the men looked at each other and did not speak.

In a moment Marjorie Carruthers had staggered to the door, that old instinct of helpfulness alive within her which had nerved the shrinking, delicate woman to face Death, — ay, to wrestle with him when the need came.

The long, narrow, steep staircase stretched before her. Her strength gone, her nerves strained, her limbs bruised, Marjorie Carruthers stood still and gasped for breath, wondering whether she should ever be able to descend. The men followed her closely, several going before, fancying she might fall with every step, and ready to seize her in case she did.

They would gladly have borne her down in their arms, but something in the white, still face made them hesitate to offer this; so she made her way alone, clinging to the railing, and pausing occasionally and gasping for breath, conscious only that she had been just plucked from the very jaws of Death, and that she was going down to meet Something below, — was it a shapeless mass? — which a moment before had been the strong arm and the brave heart that had wrenched her out of the elevator and hurled her back, it seemed with the grip of ten giants, upon the tower floor. Who was this man, so ready to sacrifice his life to save hers?

She thought of Eleanor, whom she had left that afternoon talking and jesting with her guests at home; she thought of her lover and her brother coming back that night to hear the awful story of the life crushed out of her in one breath. Her swift fancy went over the whole awful scene, and then shuddered away from it to this man who only had come between her and that dreadful Death.

Marjorie Carruthers was never able to remember her descent of the tower staircase; she could only recall standing still once on a narrow platform when they had accomplished more than half the descent, turning to the men, and asking suddenly, "Is there a chance that he may be alive?"

"It's more than fifty feet from top to bottom," answered one of the men; and Miss Carruthers did not ask another question. She came among the crowd gathered in the wide lower room of the Furnace building, with her white, beautiful face, like a spectre from the grave.

On a lounge in the office just beyond, with the cushions hastily heaped under him, lay the figure of a man, limp and crushed, whom they had gathered up and placed there a few minutes before.

One of the officers, coming out, saw the girl moving toward the door. The pallor of his face was succeeded by an unutterable amazement as he beheld the lady.

He came straight toward her: "Miss Carruthers, how did you get down here? I was just coming up in search of you."

"I must have walked down, I suppose."

"You did! You came down that long, steep staircase! I feared you must be greatly injured."

"I don't know," she answered, as though it made no difference. "Is the man in there?" glancing toward the office door, the last word freezing upon her lips.

"He's moved and groaned once or twice." Then they heard one of the men saying to another, "He'd have been jest one mass of jelly if it hadn't been for a load of mould which broke his fall."

Marjorie turned so sick she would have fallen again, if the gentleman had not caught her.

In a moment, though, the girl had braced herself, and was turning toward the office door.

Her companion drew her back. "No, Miss Carruthers," he said, very decidedly; "it is no place for you in there."

"But something must be done. Have you sent for the doctor?"

"Oh, yes; we'll see to everything of that sort. You must let me take you home at once, Miss Carruthers," looking at the pallor of her face.

She did not resist, but took the man's arm meekly as a child, for her strength was fast leaving her.

"I wish you would give orders to have the man brought over to the house," she said; "we can make him more comfortable there."

"It will be best, however, to wait until the doctor comes, and hear what he thinks of the removal," answered the officer, and she knew that he thought it was too late for any change now; and then, as the two walked through the building, she fell to dreaming, in a kind of dazed way, of the last words which Benjamin Whitmarsh had said to her as he went away that afternoon, and everything else began to seem like a dream, and she forgot the crowd of grimed, shocked faces all around.

Just as they reached the door she stood still. There was a carriage drawn up here, and the gentleman was about to lift her into it. Marjorie waved him off a moment. "What was this man's name?" she asked.

"He was one of the day hands, — Hardy Shumway!"

"Hardy Shumway!" the name dropping like a dead weight out of her white lips; then a cry of sharp anguish burst out of them: —

"O Berry! — little Berry!"

At that moment a carriage dashed up to the door. John Whitmarsh and his brother alighted. Neither had learned of the accident; but the latter caught sight of Miss Carruthers' figure in the door-way, and he hurried toward her.

"Why, Marjorie! — why, Marjorie!" he said.

"O Ben!" and with that cry she tottered and fell into his arms.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It had just struck Berry Shumway that it was past the usual hour for Hardy's return home. She had had the busiest, happiest day; bustling around at one sort of work and another, for you know what an active little body she was, always keeping various "irons in the fire."

She had gone over, too, with all her treasures that day, making up her mind just what she would take abroad and what she would leave behind for Jane Coyle and the other people whom she liked.

She had had a long walk down among the meadows, for, despite a lurking anticipation of Miss Carruthers' advent on this particular day, the beauty outside proved irresistible to the girl.

She had been down by the river and gathered a few smooth pebbles for keepsakes, telling herself it might be the last time she would have a stroll there; and wondering if she should ever think of the blue gleam of the river at Tuxbury when she walked by the lakes at Interlachen.

Once in a great while, too, Hardy's half-expressed doubt that morning about Miss Carruthers being able, after all, to accomplish her purpose, came into her thoughts and nettled them as at first.

It seemed to Berry disloyal to that young lady to question the possibility of her carrying out any plans which she had avowed her determination to consummate; but, despite all her faith, there was a little lurking sense of disappointment when night came without bringing Miss Carruthers.

On Hardy's return that evening, his sister would greatly have enjoyed such a triumphant refutation of his doubts as Miss Carruthers' presence would have furnished, for Berry never once questioned in her own heart that the lady's next visit would be to announce the satisfactory arrangement of all her plans for the journey.

At last she went to the door and looked down the streets, — the long, straight street, with its plank sidewalk and an occasional young maple or poplar before it. She saw plenty of figures moving up and down, but not the one she was looking for, — not the one who had turned back that morning and given her a smile as it went out of the gate.

Then she went into the house and kindled the fire and got the teakettle on, and had just spread the table-cloth, when she heard carriage-wheels rattling up to the gate. Her heart stood still. Had Miss Carruthers come at last?

Berry sprang to the mirror and smoothed her hair, her fingers hot with anticipation to their very ends, when there came a sharp, loud knock at the front door. That did not seem like Miss Carruthers, Berry thought, as she hastened to answer the summons.

"Good-evening, my child!" It was the pleasant voice and the pleasant face of Dr. Avery that greeted her.

"O doctor," her little brown hand in his at once, "it's such a great, long while since I've seen you."

"Yes; I've been away, you know, and we doctors find it hard work to screw out a spare hour for our friends. But how has it fared with you all this time, my child?" looking at the young, bright face with an unutterable pity in his eyes, feeling how soon all that must go down in the anguish of grief.

Dr. Avery had come the bearer of sad news, but in all his life, it seemed to him, he had never shrunk from speaking the words with which duty had charged him, as he did now before that child's bright, honest eyes.

"Well, doctor, — oh, very well indeed, thank you. I've been real happy," was the prompt, earnest answer, which made the doctor's errand a little harder than before.

But the words must be spoken, and there was no time to be lost.

"Berry," taking her hand again, "I want you to jump into the carriage now, right off, and take a ride with me."

"With you, doctor?" amazement wide awake in her face.

"Yes, Berry; you are a brave little girl, I think, and could bear joy or trouble courageously, when the time and the need came."

"I don't know, doctor, I shouldn't like to try the trouble." Then looking up and catching the expression of his eyes, she said, with a sudden gasp of breath, "Why, doctor, has anything happened?"

He drew her to him: "Yes, Berry, my poor little girl, something *has* happened."

He felt her start and tremble all over. "Where, — to what, doctor?" she cried, sharply.

"Try and be a woman, my little girl, now. I think you will not disappoint all our hopes of your strength and courage, even when you come to know it has happened to Hardy."

Alas for the bright, eager face of a few minutes ago! How sharp and white it grew all of a sudden! She caught hold of the doctor: "To Hardy! Oh, tell me what has happened to him!"

"He has done a very brave, noble deed, Berry, — one which we shall remember and honor him for as long as we live; but he has had a fall, a very bad one, and he has asked for you, Berry; and so I have come to carry you over at once, and there is no time to spare."

"A fall — Hardy hurt — O doctor, where is he?" trying to grasp the meaning out of his words, and trembling all over.

"He is amongst very dear friends of his and yours, — at Mr. Whitmarsh's, at Tuxbury. They are all waiting for you there."

She put her hand to her forehead. It was no wonder the surprise had bewildered her for the moment.

"Berry," said the doctor, with that calm, steady voice which so often had quieted the ravings of sick-rooms, "there is much to be done, and, as I said, no time to be lost. Bring your shawl and hat and come with me."

Berry went at that voice, and was back in a breath.

She stood still, while the doctor wrapped her up with his soft, strong hands, and then he led her out and put her in the chaise she remembered so well; her face was white, and there was in it a kind of blank, shocked look, but she evidently had only half taken in the facts.

They were hardly started, however, when she turned suddenly to the physician, saying, "Hardy was badly hurt, you said; not dangerously, you don't mean?"

"I fear he is, Berry."

She leaned back then with a dreadful cry: "O my poor, dear Hardy!"

The sound hurt the old doctor's heart cruelly. She clutched his arm: "He's all I've got in the world. O doctor, you will save him, won't you?"

"I'll do everything for the brave, noble fellow that is in the power of man to do, Berry. You don't know yet what reason you have to be proud of your brother, my child."

"I always knew that, though nobody else did," she sobbed, and even then there was a gleam of pleasure through her tears, at the sweet praise.

In a minute she asked, with the feverish impatience of sudden grief, "But how did it happen? I want to know, doctor."

"It all happened saving the life of Miss Carruthers. There was only a moment between her and death, and in that moment your brother came between."

"Hardy did! Hardy did!" amazement checking her sobs.

"Yes, dear, Hardy has saved her life."

"Oh, the dear, sweet, beautiful lady that I loved so, and — that Hardy worshipped!"

"You are glad that she is safe, I know."

"Oh, yes, doctor, so very glad, only I can't lose Hardy either, — oh, I can't!" and again she sobbed.

Dr. Avery could not answer her. He knew only too well that no agony of grief and love could avail now to draw back Hardy Shumway from the current that was fast setting shoreward with him. But he commenced relating to Berry the history of Marjorie Carruthers' visit to the Mills that afternoon, and how she had ascended the tower, and how at last she had gone upon the elevator, when of a sudden the great central cable gave way; the men heard it parting, and knew in a moment what the sound meant; but Hardy had been the one brave hero who had sprung forward, seized Miss Carruthers, and hurled her back into the tower, when the next breath must have dashed her a shapeless mass upon the ground, fifty feet below.

Hardy had gone down with the elevator; but the huge thing had tilted on one side, and they picked the man up from a heap of soft earth which had been dumped there an hour ago for the moulding-rooms, so the fall had been broken, and the man's life not crushed out of him in a breath.

The doctor had driven rapidly all the while he was talking. He did not mean to give Berry any further chance to question him, and she choked back her sobs to listen, although every few moments they burst out involuntarily.

By this time they had reached Mr. Whitmarsh's gate. The sun had gone behind the mountains, and the brown twilight filled the air. Ben Whitmarsh must have been on the watch for them, for he came out at once and took Berry right in his arms, lifting her out of the chaise, saying, "Ah, my little friend, I am very glad you have come."

A look of intelligence passed between the two men, and Benjamin Whitmarsh said to the doctor, "There's been no apparent change since you left. He seems to suffer very little pain; but I think he grows feebler."

Then he took Berry's hand, and between the two men she walked into the house.

Mrs. Whitmarsh met her in the hall. She had just come down from her cousin's room, for the girl had hardly been able to stand when she reached home, after all this strain and excitement, and they had carried her upstairs at once.

The young matron's eyes were red with weeping; but she bent down and kissed Berry, and took off her hat and smoothed her hair, as the girl could never remember anybody's doing save the poor, dead mother's hand which had dropped away from its caresses so long before.

"Marjorie wants to see her first, and I have promised to carry her up there," said Mrs. Whitmarsh.

"Will it be well for either of them, doctor?" asked the brother-in-law, standing doubtfully by the balustrade.

"I don't see that it can do any harm," replied Dr. Avery. "You had best not keep her long, though."

So the two, Ben Whitmarsh and his sister-in-law, went up to Miss Carruthers' room with Berry Shumway. It would have seemed to the young girl's unaccustomed eyes, at any other time, that she was entering some fairy bower of grace and beauty, but now she was only conscious of the figure lying on the lounge, with the great, beautiful eyes shining out of the white face.

Miss Carruthers rose up at once, and put out her arms. "I thought you would come to me a moment, even now, Berry," she said; and the girl rushed forward, and the lady's arms closed around her.

"Ah, Berry, do you know where I should be this moment if it had not been for your brother?" asked Marjorie Carruthers when she could speak.

"Yes, I know, I know," sobbing and clinging to the lady. "O ma'am, I'm so glad that he saved you!"

"That was the very first question he asked when he came back to consciousness," said Benjamin Whitmarsh: "'Is the lady safe?'" and he came over and stood by the two.

Just then his elder brother knocked at the chamber-door: "He's been asking for her again. He knows she is here now."

"Berry, we will go down together," said young Whitmarsh, taking her hand. "Can you be very calm and brave now? Can you keep in mind that your brother is a very sick man, and it will not do to excite him?"

"I'll try, I'll try very hard," said Berry, shaking all over, and swallowing her sobs and her tears together. Then again that cry burst out of her in a swift spasm of anguish, — that cry which the doctor had heard before, and those who did now, never forgot it: "O my poor, dear Hardy!"

Then Benjamin Whitmarsh, saying no word, because he could not, took hold of her hand and led her away.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"O, HARDY!" a sharp, groping kind of cry wringing itself out of her heart and through her lips, and Berry Shumway came through the door-way into the room where Hardy lay, where they had laid him at the first, — the very room where last winter Benjamin Whitmarsh had worn away the slow, dreary days and nights of his convalescence.

Two hours before they had laid the young workman there, doubtful whether the shattered life in the big, lumbering frame would ever wake up to consciousness again.

It was not yet all over, as they had half believed, for Hardy Shumway. After the doctor came, for whom young Whitmarsh had himself started at once, the man, with a few convulsive gasps, had opened his eyes and strained and stared wildly at the white, shocked faces about him.

In a few moments the truth came back on him. Everybody knew when that happened, by the look in his face.

"Is the lady safe?" his voice loud and clear enough to startle the people in the next room with its sharp greediness, — "Is the lady safe?" his first question, not for himself, you see, not even for the little sister whose face, as he had left it smiling on him in the low door-way that morning, had clung to his thoughts all day.

Ben Whitmarsh, at the head of the bed, bent his face over the wounded man and spoke a few choked words, so low that nobody else caught them. But young Shumway moved his head a little, and looked straight in the eyes bending over him, — such a look that those who saw never forgot it. It had something of the awful joy of a man on the battle-field, with the life-blood oozing out of him, while the shouts of victory, in the air around, fall upon his dulling senses. It seemed to transfigure all at once the big, pallid face upon the pillows. "Thank God, oh, thank God!" he said, and his lips worked and quivered over the words, and then were still.

He did not suffer much pain. Indeed, there were few outward signs of that dreadful fall; but the shock had paralyzed his lower limbs, and the injuries were mostly of an internal character.

Dr. Avery's examination of his patient was a very brief one: a few questions, a few touches of pulse and crushed limbs, and the skilled surgeon knew where the hurt lay, and what it all meant. All the time Hardy Shumway watched the old doctor with curious eyes, but not half so eagerly as those about him did; holding back their breaths, for the sentence of life or death hung on a shake of that fine, old gray head. "Did the man lying there know it too?" they wondered, watching his eyes following the doctor with dull curiosity, much as though the whole did not concern himself. They would have fancied the poor fellow's brain was still half stunned, if it had not been for that greedy cry a few moments before.

At last the doctor bent down, his face unmoved still, so that one could not dive to the meanings below it: "Is there anything I can do for you, my poor fellow?" his voice soft as a mother's; that very softness telling something to Hardy Shumway's soul, if it did not to the others'.

The man's lips fumbled together a moment; then he cried out, "Berry! I want little Berry!"

"I'll go for her," said the doctor, and he went out without another word, and without another, also, Benjamin Whitmarsh followed him.

In the hall the two men faced each other.

"Doctor —" he stopped there.

"If there was the barest ghost of a chance, you know I wouldn't leave him, Ben," said the elder.

"But to have him die like this! Giving his life to save hers!" burst out the younger. "I never faced so heroic a deed in my life. It shames, staggers me. O doctor, I'd give the last dollar I possess —" He could get no farther.

"All the skill in the world could not avail now for the poor fellow. A brave, glorious deed, as you say;" his voice clutching at the last words, as though he feared it would have to let them go.

"How long will it be first?" asked young Whitmarsh.

"He may hold out until after midnight."

"No longer than that?" with a great start.

"You want the truth, Whitmarsh: you are a man and must bear it. When the dawn comes up the east yonder, the eyes of the poor fellow lying in there will not turn to see it."

And with those words the doctor had gone for Berry.

So she had come, and, with the first sharpness of agony at sight of the pallid face on the pillows, a cry rung out on her lips, "O Hardy!" and Berry rushed forward to the bedside.

There were people all around her, but Berry Shumway would not have known, if they had stood many a phalanx deep; there was nobody in the whole, great, wide, gaping, noisy world, to the tender, tortured heart of this child, but just herself and this big, helpless man, who lay there with his limbs like blocks of stone, and his heavy, livid face.

The dull eyes cleared and lighted in a moment at that cry. She came right up and put her cheek down to her brother's, in just the way she used to do when she was a little, motherless toddler around the old, bare room so long ago, and Hardy would come home at night, tired and cross; and that little child's soft, warm cheek laid up against his own was the only thing in the world Hardy Shumway had to cling to; and small and soft as it was, I tell you that child's cheek had kept the heart within him from many a time going straight to the devil.

"Little Berry," putting out his hand and fumbling with the big fingers feebly at her hair; "poor little Berry! I'm glad you've come," the white, dull face shining on her now with a great love and a great pity.

The shock of the last hour had bewildered Berry

Shumway, much as a stunning blow would. She only half took in Hardy's desperate condition. She knew that he had some dreadful hurt, and that he lay sick and helpless before her, but she did not suspect that Something which was drawing nearer and nearer to him, and that her warm, swift little hands could not keep at bay.

They kept at work now, though, smoothing his pillow and smiling at him, and Berry did not know that her cheeks were wet, and that she kept swallowing her tears all the time she was talking.

"Do you suffer any pain, Hardy?" she asked.

"Not much, Berry. Never mind that. I'm glad you've come, little sister."

"You dear fellow! As though I wouldn't have gone straight to the ends of the world after you! We'll have you up in a day or two. I'll take precious care of you. Don't you know how I nursed you through that fever ever so long ago, and the doctor said nobody else could have done it so well? I al'ays know just what you want, Hardy."

"Yes, I remember; but this is worse than the fever, Berry — pretty little Berry."

"No matter," she said; "I'm older than I was then, — ever so much, and real tough. I can stand it, Hardy."

What went on in Hardy Shumway's soul as he listened to the child's pretty, coaxing talk, only God knew.

The young workman must have thought over all her daily loving, fussing ways, the humming voice, the smiling face, the little scoldings and pets, and the warm, true, honest little heart that never failed him in the loving or scolding; he must have thought, too, of what life would be to her without him, left all alone in the world, the days coming and going, with nothing for the warm, loving heart to cling to; he knew how it needed him. What would become of it, left cold and empty and desolate in the world? His face quivered and shook all of a sudden, and Hardy Shumway cried out sharply, "O Berry, it will come hard to leave you — it will!"

Anything less than stone, seeing that scene, hearing that cry, must have melted, and they were men and women with human hearts in them who stood around that bedside.

Berry looked up swiftly in the doctor's face at that cry; an awful terror leaped into and strained her eyes wide. She half took in Hardy's meaning, and the blood froze at her heart. Then she turned back and flung her arms around her brother's neck and cried out fiercely: "Oh, but you won't die, Hardy, — you mustn't. God won't be so cruel, — he can't, — as to take you away from me, when he knows you are all I have in the world. What would I do without you, Hardy, in the old home? It would be so dark and lonesome there. How could I live without having you to think about and care for all day, to do up your breakfast o'mornings, and run down to the lane o'nights to walk home with you? I couldn't live without you, you know I couldn't; but you'll get well, dear old Hardy! you know you will, just for my sake, and 'cause you know what it would be to me if you didn't; and we will have the old happy times in the dear little home, — happier than ever. I've been cross sometimes, I know I have, and made a fuss about the tobacco-smoke and things; but I won't any more. When you come back you shall sit right by the fire with your pipe all day, and I won't say a word, and we will be so happy, and you'll get real well and strong in a little while, Hardy, — just a little while."

They were men and women, as I said, with human hearts in them, who listened to that child's talk as they stood around the bedside; not many, it is true; but Mr. and Mrs. Whitmarsh had come downstairs, and their brother stood in the next room, and the door was ajar, and every word came to him; and there were the house-servants and several men from the Mills, and one or two distant neighbors, who had learned of the accident and hurried over to the house to be on hand at call; and all of these heard and saw, and to their dying day not one will forget. Hardy Shumway looked up in the doctor's face: its goodness, its strength, its unutterable pity struck him at that moment. "She'll be all alone, all alone, little Berry," he said, with an anguish of appeal that went straight to the old man's heart.

He laid his hand on the girl's head, the words were at his lips, when there was a sudden step at the bedside, and Benjamin Whitmarsh leaned his face once more over the face on the pillows. "Give the child to us, Shumway," he said; "she shall not be alone in the world. We will take her to our home, Marjorie and I — " he could get no farther, and the room was full of sobs. Hardy Shumway looked up in the young man's face; his heavy jaw worked a moment. "Marjorie and you!" he muttered, not seeming to take in what had gone.

They fancied his mind was wandering a little: "Yes, Miss Carruthers, the lady whose life you saved, my poor, brave fellow!" and after that he bent down his head, and said something to the workman that the others could not hear.

Hardy Shumway half raised his head from his pillow, a great light shot up over his whole face, the eyes glowed like coals of fire with some strange joy; he kept staring at Ben Whitmarsh. "Thank God! oh, thank God!" he said, and there was a low, happy laugh choking and gurgling in his throat.

"His mind wanders," the people around whispered.

Perhaps he heard them. At any rate a look of bright intelligence was in the eyes he turned now full on Benjamin Whitmarsh.

"I've done something for you sir, then?" he said, in a voice half proud and half humble, but eager and exultant.

"Something for me! My dear fellow, you've done for me the greatest good that it was in the power of living man to do," answered Ben Whitmarsh, with a solemnity that conquered his agitation at that moment. "You have saved *her* life, and that is dearer to me than my own!"

Again that flash of delight all over the livid face. "Thank God!" and again the happy laugh gurgled in his throat. Berry did not know what it meant. The poor, broken-hearted, bewildered thing clung still to the hope that Hardy would live, and they two would go back to the old house, and things would go on just as they had done before.

She was not surprised at what Hardy had done. Whatever he might seem to others, the stolid young workman, with his dull face and lumbering figure, had always been a hero in her eyes; as pure and noble as those whom high-born maidens used to watch from latticed windows, going out with plume and war-horse to right the wronged and do battle with evil wherever they found it.

The generous courage with which Hardy had leaped to Miss Carruthers' defence in her deadly peril was not a thing which amazed Berry Shumway, whatever others might think of it.

Just at that instant there was a movement at the door, and they saw Marjorie Carruthers coming in; one of the servants, excited past control at the scene below, had burst into the lady's chamber and told her how Berry Shumway was " going on, over that poor dying man." Miss Carruthers was lying on the couch; she rose up, forgetting that her head was dizzy and her limbs sore with bruises, and she came downstairs. Benjamin Whitmarsh had put his arm around Berry Shumway, and the poor thing was clinging to him, with long, shivering sobs; but, at sight of Miss Carruthers, he placed the girl in Doctor Avery's arms and sprang to the lady's side.

" You are not fit to come in here, Marjorie," he said, quickly.

"No matter; he must not die without my telling him;" and she came right forward to the bed, with her white, beautiful face, and she and Hardy Shumway looked at each other.

There she stood, the woman whose life he had saved; there he lay, the man who had given his life to rescue hers, and there was no sound in the room save the faint swashing of the winds among the vine-leaves by the open window. Then Marjorie Carruthers broke out of a sudden: "I have no right to stand here, with my life whole and sound within me, and see you lying there. Berry needed you, and I — why didn't you leave me to die, Hardy Shumway?"

In her agony of grief at that instant she wished from her soul he had done that.

"But there was one needed you, too. I saved you for him, — for him!" a flash of joy in his eyes, as they went in search of Benjamin Whitmarsh.

He had come to the bedside now and drawn his arm around Miss Carruthers, and so they two stood before Hardy Shumway. It was no time for ordinary ceremonies, when Life and Death faced each other. "I take her from your hands, my dear fellow. Would to God there was something I could do worthily for you in turn!" and even Berry stood still, with the doctor's arm around her, and held her breath to listen.

"For me in turn! Did you say that?" lifting his head from the pillow, a dreadful greediness in his eyes, like a man who pleads with his executioner for life. "If you would say one word, — just one, — I should be paid, feelin' God would do it then, too;" his head sinking back, his hands fumbling and groping at the bedclothes, and again the people around muttered, "His mind wanders!" Benjamin Whitmarsh thought this also; nevertheless he leaned over the pillows, saying, passionately, as though he were calling out into that dark and distance where the man's soul was drifting, "If there is anything I can say or do for you, I need not say it shall be done."

The young workman looked up. What a contrast there was in the two faces, if one could notice such things at such a time, — the large, blunt features, the massive jaws, the coarsely hewn outlines of the one, with the delicate carving, the fine strength and force of the other!

Hardy Shumway's gaze seemed at that moment to go past the face into the soul lying behind it, — to dive down, one might have half fancied, into the very quick of this man's nature, to find whether there lay deep in it some mighty pity and tenderness to which he could trust himself; longing and doubt struggled in the man's face; he glanced at Berry in a way that was more like fright than anything else. "I dare not do it," muttering half to himself; "I dare not, for her sake. It couldn't harm me now; I've done what I could to atone; God knows that; yet it would be a little easier to go to him now, if I could hear the words." Then he started, and stared all around him as though he feared something had passed his lips which should have been forced back.

Berry thought with the others that her brother did not know what he was saying; but Dr. Avery had been watching silently every change that went over the man's face. He was used to the babble of sick and dying men, and he knew what truth and meaning often underlay their wild, incoherent talk.

He came forward now and bent over the sick man. "My friend," said the soft, solemn voice of the old physician, taking hold of the big, groping fingers, "if there is anything on your mind that you would like to say to us, — anything you would like to have us know or ask us to do, — do not hesitate to speak now; these are only friends around you, — friends your brave, generous heart has won for you, — friends ready to serve you with all their hearts and souls. Will you speak?"

Hardy Shumway looked up in the doctor's face, — the kindly face under the gray hair; the white lips worked, a great trouble came into his eyes: "There's something I'd like to confess; only it would come hard, — yet I want to die in peace," the big jaw quivering.

The doctor bent nearer, so that the others could not hear: "I cannot judge for you, my poor fellow. If there is any wrong you can right, it will be better to speak now; and I think it will make it easier to go to that God, tenderer and more pitiful than your mother when she rocked you on her knee."

The ashen jaws quivered again: "You think I'm going to him in a little while, doctor?"

"In a little while, I think."

He lay quite still a moment after that. Then he signed the doctor to draw near again; his eyes were not dull now, but the bright life was full of fright or horror.

"It's something I did once, doctor," speaking very rapidly, as though he feared he should not be able to get the words out. "Nobody knows in the world. It would kill Berry, and it would turn all of you against me, — make you cast me out from your doors, even now."

For a moment Dr. Avery himself fancied the man's brain was wandering; but through all the agitation of Hardy Shumway's face the eyes held a clear light,— he knew what he was saying.

"Don't talk of our hating you, my poor fellow, after what you have done. No matter what the wrong was, you have earned your pardon."

Hardy started now. "Do you really think that?" his face full of a dreadful eagerness. "If I could only hear *him* say it, I could die easy when the time comes."

"Who is he?" asked the doctor; then he added, "Tell me or not, as you like," for he would not force himself on the dying man's confidence.

Hardy Shumway did not answer, but his gaze shot straight over to where Benjamin Whitmarsh stood a little way off, and he had gathered Berry's head upon his shoulder.

Dr. Avery was puzzled. Whatever the wrong was, which lay heavy, in his dying hour, on the workman's conscience, the doctor saw his soul would not go out peacefully to meet the Death that was coming unless the man made full confession of his sin. Perhaps the deed at this time assumed a magnitude and complexion to Hardy Shumway's imagination which it did not in reality possess. At least, the physician hoped so.

The man's closed eyes opened of a sudden. "I can't die first. I must tell, doctor," he moaned.

"Shall I send them all away? To whom will you tell it?" asked Dr. Avery, with a feeling that this might be more serious than he had suspected.

"I shall want you by me, doctor;" and again his gaze went in quest of Benjamin Whitmarsh and Marjorie Carruthers. "She must be here, too," he said.

Dr. Avery understood. Everybody, even to Berry herself, supposed that the young workman's confidence related solely to his sister, and the poor, heart-broken thing submitted readily to be led away by Mr. and Mrs. Whitmarsh; only when she reached the door the child turned and said to Hardy, with a pitiful attempt at a smile, "I may come back pretty soon?"

"Yes, pretty soon, little Berry;" and then the door closed, and these three, Benjamin Whitmarsh and Marjorie Carruthers and Dr. Avery, were alone with the dying man.

They raised his head upon the pillows, for his breath came in hard, swift gasps now, and the lividness deepened around the heavy jaws, and the fingers tore convulsively at the bed-covers. It was dreadful to see him.

"There, my friend, don't try to tell us. Let it go," said young Whitmarsh, smoothing away the thick, coarse hair from the man's forehead. "It's cruel in you to torment yourself so, Shumway."

"She wasn't to blame. You won't ever let her know — little Berry! It would kill her. You'll be good to her, just the same as though she wasn't the sister of — " his voice shook and shrank there.

The men and the woman gave their promise eagerly. To the day of her death Berry should never hear her brother's confession, whatever that might be.

Then Hardy Shumway turned and looked, — first in the face of Benjamin Whitmarsh, and then at Marjorie Carruthers, as they stood by his bedside. Whether it was fright or the Death close at hand which made that cold terror in his face, no one could tell. The gaze that wandered with that awful appeal over the man and woman, dropped and fell. He put his shaking hands over his face. He cried out, and his cry was: "It was me and Blatchley did it!"

"Did what?" cried the trio of voices involuntarily, and each one shuddered at something that was to come.

"*That came so near murderin' you one night last winter!*"

Benjamin Whitmarsh was a man of strong nerves, but he sickened and staggered to the window for fresh air, and Marjorie Carruthers followed him, clutching wildly at her lover's arm, as though the blow of that night had struck him down again. "O my God! my God!" she cried, not knowing what she said.

Dr. Avery was an old man, and though he said afterward that no human words had ever struck the sudden trembling over him which that speech of Hardy Shumway's did, he took the amazement and horror more quietly than the others. In a few moments, too, he had seen through the whole. The circumstances fitted into one another, — the whole dreadful mystery and madness lay bare to him. He knew, too, that this day's work measured the remorse and agony which Hardy Shumway had borne for that's night's crime.

"My poor fellow!" a voice husky with pity spoke the words close in his ear, and at that sound Hardy Shumway took down his hands and looked in the doctor's face. He must have seen the shock there with which the old physician had listened to the confession, but the deep gray eyes were full of an unutterable sorrow and pity. And Benjamin Whitmarsh and Marjorie Carruthers stood at the window, and the winds shook softly among the leaves, and overhead shone the stars of God, and waited to see what the two would do. It never entered into the heart of the man and woman to doubt one word of what Hardy Shumway had said.

They turned and looked at each other, and, for a moment, with the life sound in every limb which the man lying there on the bed had yielded up his own to spare, Marjorie Carruthers forgot her debt, — forgot everything but the death which Hardy Shumway had come so near dealing the man of her love, and a hot hatred swelled through her.

Dr. Avery came over to the two. "Come back and tell the man you forgive him," he said.

"I can't, — oh, I can't do that!" Marjorie cried out, with a quick loathing and horror in her voice.

The physician turned to the young man. "He tried to take your life, but he saved *hers*," he said, simply.

Benjamin Whitmarsh lifted himself up; without another word he took hold of Marjorie's arm and led her straight over to the bed where Hardy Shumway lay.

"You have saved the dearer life," he said. "You have made atonement. From my heart, Hardy Shumway, I forgive you!"

If you could have seen then the look which came into the dying man's face, — if you could have seen it!

"I shall not be afraid to go to God now. He knows, — he knows!" he said; and after that he did not speak for a little while, and they half fancied he had gone out with those words on his white, stiffening lips.

Miss Carruthers plucked at the doctor's arm. "I didn't forgive him, and now he will never know," she whispered.

"I want to tell you all about it," said Hardy Shumway, rousing himself a moment after, his voice clear and steady.

Marjorie pressed up to him. She placed her soft fingers in Hardy Shumway's. "It is the very hand which you wrenched out of Death's grasp to-day. I, too, forgive you," she sobbed.

And then Hardy Shumway's other hand groped for Benjamin Whitmarsh's, and laid Marjorie's there, and they knew that he meant it was his gift, and they remembered the price he had paid for it; and life had been sweet to the young workman; and there, too, was his little sister in the other room!

I wish I could tell you the story, as the man lying there forced himself to tell it, with the two men and the woman listening, and that Other, also, whose face none of them saw, but who comes, sooner or later, to all bedsides to catch the last, faint, groping words that are spoken there, — the face that all through life we shrink from with a nameless dread and terror, and that yet, at the last, may wear for each one of us a kindly welcoming face, "the fear of Death being taken away."

I think no pen wielded by human fingers could tell his story as Hardy Shumway told it that night, — could give it the simple, eloquent passion of his own words, — could bring it all, vivid and real, home to your souls, as he brought the whole home to the souls of his hearers.

He lived it all over himself in that dying hour, — the slow, long misery of the last winter, the cold, the hunger, the wearying, fruitless search for work, until, at last, brain and heart grew dull and hard with the hopeless struggle, settling down for the most part into a cold apathy of despair, except when the sight of Berry's little peaked face drove the man half mad with pity and misery.

The girl, however, always stoutly insisted that she was not hungry; and her brother tried to shut his eyes to the facts and believe her. Then she had her own ways of cheating him, — saving what food there was for her big brother, and going off to the Mills many a cold winter's morning, with hardly a morsel to break her fast, scraping together all the scant food the larder afforded for Hardy's lunch, and leaving it there, like the brave little heroine she was, telling him she had put up her share, fancying to herself that a big fellow like Hardy could not go half starved, so easily as a little thin, wiry scrap of flesh and blood like herself.

One day, lounging down among the shops of the Settlement, listless and wretched, Hardy came upon an old acquaintance, a man a good many years his senior, — Dick Blatchley by name. They had toiled together in the copper mines of Cornwall long ago, when Hardy was a boy. He had never liked the man, but in his present mood of sullen despair or frenzied misery any kind of company was a certain relief, and Hardy Shumway was not likely to be fastidious just then about his society. Blatchley was a large, raw-boned, big-jointed fellow; a coarse, lank face, fringed with thin, yellowish beard, and at times a cunning leer in his eye, which Hardy remembered in the old days when he used to listen to the fellow's jokes going up and down the shafts together in the old mines at Cornwall.

The man had his jokes now, and they, at least, took Hardy's thoughts for a little while out of his own wretchedness; and then Blatchley had seen a great deal during these years, which had given Hardy Shumway a home in the New World and made a man of him.

The other had left mining and followed the seas, — always as a deck hand. It was wonderful, if one could credit Blatchley's stories, how often luck had crossed the path of this man and just missed him. Hardy could not fail to perceive that the other's seafaring life had hardened and coarsened him a good deal. His sneering, boastful talk was checkered with oaths, and he smoked vile tobacco and drank wretched whiskey.

He was out of employment, and in the miserable health which is the result of an irregular life and dissipated habits.

It was evident enough that, whatever money the man had made, he had squandered it recklessly, and he had drifted up from some not very remote seaport to Tuxbury, to see if any chance opened for him among the mines, although his reckless, wandering habits would have rendered it quite impossible for Blatchley to settle down into industry and honesty. No employment offered itself to him any more than it did to young Shumway that winter.

But chance seemed to throw the two men frequently together, and Hardy grew used to the vulgar stories and the coarse jests, interlarded with oaths, and the whole talk of his companion, which left a bad odor in one's thoughts.

Idleness and poverty were doing bad work on Hardy Shumway, as they do on all human souls.

Blatchley had no faith in God or man, — only in luck and the devil. He used to say, with one of his loud guffaws, that these two were his masters, and that the difference betwixt him and most other men was, that he was honest enough to own up to facts — with a great deal more talk of that sort.

Hardy Shumway always left his old mining comrade a little worse man than he met him, — in a little harder mood toward God and the world in general. Little Berry had no suspicion how many of her brother's harsh speeches and sullen hours were owing to this man, from whom she shrank, at the beginning, as from something vile and loathsome.

The sailor, too, was primed with stories of men who by a single dash at luck had cleared a fortune, — sometimes by gambling, sometimes by successful housebreaking or highway robbery. He never used just those ugly words; he always glossed over the deeds with something that disguised or palliated their monstrous features.

Hardy Shumway had, at bottom, a sturdy sense of honesty, which recoiled from this talk at first; but at last he grew used to it. Of course he would never soil his fingers with any such business, but, after all, there was a good deal of truth in what Blatchley said: "Every man has to look out for his own cup of porridge in this world." So the talk worked in the mill-hand's brain; in his heart also; both being worse for the new ideas Blatchley had insinuated there. One night something else worked in Hardy's Shumway's heart, — something fierce and cruel as fire, cold and hard as ice.

It was that awful night on which he had lain awake and tossed through on a bed that was like a rack to him; thinking of Berry in the next room, and of the words wrung out of her pain as she went upstairs:—

"I'm so hungry I can't sleep. If there was only one good slice of bread in this house!"

Those words maddened him. They let in a sudden light upon the poor child's contrivances and shifts for the last weeks. He saw how she had been stinting and starving herself in order that he should have, at least, part of a meal.

In the darkness there the poor fellow set his grim jaws and gnashed his teeth impotently; yet, with all his brawny strength, he could not earn a loaf of bread to save his sister from starvation.

Hardy Shumway's brain was not a particularly shrewd one, but it could at least take in that one fact in all its bearings.

In his desperation it seemed to the young workman that God and man had turned his foes; he lay there and fought through the long hours of that wretched night, and thought of Berry, — poor little Berry, — in the next room, going supperless to bed.

The next morning, it is true, matters brightened a little, for Hardy, driven to desperation, set off early for the grocer's, and the man, moved by his appeal, trusted him to whatever he asked, and Berry set out for the Mills with such a breakfast as she had not tasted for weeks. But that was only a temporary make-shift. There were other mornings to come, and other breakfasts would be needed for them, as Hardy well knew.

That day Hardy wandered a long distance from the Settlement, in a desperate quest of work.

Returning home, late in the afternoon, on one of the lonely country roads, he came upon Dick Blatchley. The latter had complained of illness for several days, hardly dragging himself a few doors from his lodgings. He was so disguised now by an old white coat and muffler, in which his jaws were concealed, that Hardy would not have recognized the sailor had not the man accosted him.

Blatchley had, of course, before this, Hardy's version of his being turned out of the Mills, and his comments on the outrage of the whole proceeding were of a nature precisely calculated to inflame the workman's sore feelings on that subject.

I am telling this story, not in Hardy Shumway's words, as you can see, but in my own, seeking to dwell as briefly as possible on the misery and crime. I do not seek, either, to excuse Hardy Shumway. I certainly do not ask you to do it. I only want you should put yourself right in his place at that time, — the cold, the hunger, the fits of sullen despair, the frenzies of desperation; and the little sister at home, the only thing he loved on earth, and her sharp, smothered cry of last night ringing in his ears, — I want you should put yourself in his place, and then judge him.

Blatchley was in the habit of taking long tramps about the country. He had had one that day, setting out for a town eight miles from Tuxbury, after reaching which he prowled around the bank with no especial purpose in view; only the man had a great hankering for a "windfall," as he called it, at this time. He was out of employment and of money, and Coyle had that very morning been dunning him for his board.

Wandering up the small, narrow alley upon which the bank door opened, Blatchley had remarked to himself what an old, shackling concern the whole building was, "and that it could not be so hard a matter for a cool, plucky fellow to break his way inside and get hold of a good slice of the pile shut up in the vault there. He wouldn't mind a chance at a haul himself."

With these thoughts for company, the man came suddenly upon the back door opening into the dark entry, — the door which happened to stand ajar on this particular morning.

Blatchley peered inside, heard a hum of voices there, and slipped his tall, gaunt figure into the entry, and no word, for the next half hour, spoken in the adjoining room, between the bank president and his guest, escaped the man listening concealed in the darkness.

At last he slipped out, surreptitiously as he had entered, only this time the guest had gone, and a stealthy, scraping sound did reach the president's ear. He rose up, half consciously, went to the door, and, before closing it, looked up and down the alley. He saw nothing. Blatchley took good care of that, concealing himself for a while in an angle of the opposite wall.

But during that half hour in the bank entry, the grizzled sailor had learned something which he regarded as of vital importance to himself. Tramping home along the low, silent country roads, thick with mire, this man laid some plans for the night, which, to carry out successfully, rendered the assistance of a second person indispensable.

Blatchley was turning over one and another of his cronies in his mind, not satisfied that any one possessed just the qualifications requisite for the work in hand, when he came suddenly upon Hardy Shumway, in one of the by-roads that led across the marshes to the turnpike.

With the first salutation the older man saw that the younger was in desperate trouble. A little adroit questioning soon drew the principal facts out of Shumway.

The sailor began to question with himself whether he had not struck upon the right man. This sullen, desperate mood was the only one, he well knew, which would make Hardy Shumway ripe for such work as Blatchley had laid out.

You may be certain that the grizzled villain played his game with the younger adroitly; treating the whole affair first as a jest, and then changing its complexion into a solemn mystery; and at last, when he felt that he had worked sufficiently upon young Shumway's curiosity and greed, the two men went into the woods together, and there Blatchley's whole diabolical plot came out and showed its true features. Whatever Hardy Shumway's faults were, there had been all the habits and instincts, all the old, clean teachings woven into his boyhood in the old English home among the miners, that rose up and made him recoil with horror and loathing from Blatchley's proposition.

"I can't do it, Blatchley, — my hands are clean;" staring at them as they lay on his knees red and cold, while the two men sat under the bare trees which sheltered them from the sour, rasping wind of the winter day. "I can't turn highway robber! I can starve first, I and little Berry."

Blatchley was used to dealing with men comparatively innocent in crime. "It may seem honest to you," sneered the wily old villain, "to let a pretty little helpless craft like that sister o' yourn go to wreck for want of a little food; but, sir, if she belonged to me, and there was any way o' getting her a good meal, by fair means or foul, I should think I deserved a halter if I didn't get it. I tell you what, Shumway, when you've lived to be as old a man as I have, you'll find out there's a mighty deal of cant and gammon about honesty in the world. When you come to talk o' that, though, I think the young fellow that's comin' up the road to-night with his pockets crammed full o' money is the real robber. What right have you to be turned out o' your place, I'd like to know, and the bread taken from your sister's mouth?"

There was a great deal more talk of this sort, — talk that you may be sure, in his half-sullen, half-frenzied mood, had its effect on young Shumway. There was a long, hard struggle for hours, though, — such a one that Blatchley began more than once to doubt whether he had not lost precious time and made a mistake in the selection of his man; but he had another abettor in the shape of a bottle of bad whiskey; he primed Hardy with this as he did with his specious arguments, backed with sneers and entreaties; and at last, his brain on fire with drink, as his heart was with wrong and suffering, just as the sun went down, Hardy Shumway put his hand in Dick Blatchley's and swore that he would be his man.

Two hours later the men waited below in the hollow for the clattering of young Whitmarsh's horse up the road. It came at last, and these two were ready for it. Blatchley had a pistol with him, but he had sworn to Hardy Shumway not to use it, — that there would be no need of it.

It was the money, not murder, they were bent on.

Yet, notwithstanding this talk, the elder robber, who was far cooler than the younger, had a sort of prescience that the man he was to deal with would not be likely to submit to highway robbery without a struggle.

"It was best to be prepared for all hazards," making sure meanwhile that his pistol was well loaded, and priming Hardy Shumway with the vile stuff which fired his blood and fuddled his brain.

What followed you know. Benjamin Whitmarsh was a brave fellow, and, when his blood was up, a rash one. It was Shumway who assured him that they did not want his life,—only his money. In the scuffle that followed, Shumway, too, got hold of the pistol. He did not intend to fire it, only to frighten young Whitmarsh; but Blatchley had loaded it, and it went off.

The sailor searched the pockets, and found they had taken all this pains for a few dollars. He had to drag Hardy away at last, for the latter was stupefied with horror over his crime, and would have remained a cowering heap by the man whom they left, as they supposed, lying dead by the roadside.

Blatchley took his companion home to Coyle's, and kept him there all night, taking care that the people in the house should not know this, and they fancied that their lodger had been ill in his room most of the day.

The next morning, however, the men learned how young Whitmarsh had been discovered by the roadside and carried home for dead, and what happened afterward.

After that Blatchley ventured to trust Shumway out of his sight, which he had not dared to do before, lest the young man in his wild remorse should reveal the whole dreadful crime.

The sailor had promised to "go halves" with his companion in guilt; but Blatchley seized the lion's share for himself. Hardy, indeed, never so much as inquired the amount taken from the rifled pockets.

He would not have touched the money had not Blatchley thrust some pittance into his hand, and told him to get a breakfast for that "little pinched, shivering thing at home."

But no mouthful of that ill-gotten food ever crossed the lips of Hardy Shumway. He would have starved first.

Hardy Shumway told his story that night in fewer words than I have done; but the two men and the woman listening there, with the winds scraping at the windows and the stars shining overhead, learned the whole.

At the last his voice wavered and sank fitfully, and his face grew sharper in its ashen pallor.

And you may be certain that poverty that night seemed something real and awful to Benjamin Whitmarsh and Marjorie Carruthers, that it had never seemed in all their lives before.

CHAPTER XXV.

ALL this time Dr. Avery had his fingers on the man's pulse. The old physician had listened in just this way to many death-bed revelations, — the sad, closing chapters of human lives which had in any wise sense proved themselves failures, miscarried from infirmity of purpose or lack of moral balance, or, worse than this, slimed with foulness and evil, come down to the last hour's wreck and remorse; souls over which the old man's heart breathed a final prayer as he gave them back with their weight of wasted years to the dear God, who he hoped would deal more mercifully with them than any human love or wisdom could.

But no husky, stammering voice had ever poured out of stiffening lips a story which shook the old doctor to the centre as did this one of Hardy Shumway's.

No need that the man should dwell on his remorse; that was witnessed by one desperate leap into the jaws of Death, by the crushed limbs lying there on the bed never to rise again, by the life going out suddenly in its lusty, young manhood; and again the doctor thought, "Life was sweet to the young workman, and there was his little sister who loved him so dearly, and was ignorant of all, in the other room!"

Benjamin Whitmarsh and Marjorie Carruthers had their thoughts too. Standing there with his arm around the woman of his love to steady her, shaking and shivering with horror at the awful story she had just learned, young Whitmarsh could not help putting himself in the workman's place, with the bitter cold and the gnawing hunger, and the dear face of Marjorie before him growing paler and sharper every day, precisely as Berry's had grown.

The workman paused a few moments, excited and breathless, living over all those dreadful scenes, but his voice soon trembled out eagerly into the silence: "I should never have done it, if it hadn't been for Berry. She was all I had in the world, you see, and it seemed to drive me mad that night, when I heard her going to bed moanin' for a little piece o' bread."

A wild burst of sobbing from Miss Carruthers followed this remark. Benjamin Whitmarsh leaned again over the dying man, and his will had again and again the task of mastering his failing voice as he said, "My poor fellow, if the woman whom I love better than my life, had stood in Berry's place, and I in yours — I cannot tell — God only knows — I, too, might have been driven mad, *and done what you did!*"

Young Shumway made no answer, but a look came into his eyes. Ask Benjamin Whitmarsh if he will forget that look to his dying day!

Shumway's brain wandered a little after that, for he began to talk of the Mills and Berry. The doctor touched the arm of young Whitmarsh. "It won't last long," he whispered. "You had better send for the child."

All this time she had been waiting in the next room, fluttered and bewildered. Poor Berry! She had never found herself of so much consequence before in her life; but it mattered very little to her at that time. She knew that everybody spoke gently, and looked at her with kind, sorrowful looks, urging her to take some food; which she tried very hard to do, but she could only swallow the first mouthful.

When some sudden earthquake of grief shakes the solid ground under our feet, our thoughts, shocked and confused, unable oftentimes to take in the whole magnitude of the evil, drift about helplessly among trivial scenes and things.

So did Berry's, sitting there by the window and waiting for them to call her back to Hardy's bedside. Overhead were the still, bright, solemn stars,— the stars that were shining down on the little home only three miles away, but which seemed so very far off now, just as the morning did when she had fastened the flower in Hardy's button-hole, and stood in the door with the sunlight shining in her eyes, as she watched him going up the street. Through all these thoughts and memories, groping and clinging among the old habits and the old scenes, was a vague wonder whether to-morrow would not come back and find everything just as it was before, — whether Berry would not open her eyes and see the red sunrise shining in through the small window-panes, and spring up in a hurry, remembering there was Hardy's breakfast to get ready before he set off for the Mill.

Had all that old life drifted suddenly away from her, as tides drift away off from the shore, and left her nothing but a vague future, all darkness and chaos, which her thoughts shuddered and drew back from with terror?

So Berry sat, with her small, peaked face by the window, her thoughts busy and frightened within her, her tears dripping on her hands, silent and cold on her lap now,— those warm, restless little hands so deft of touch, so swift for work and help: they had come to a standstill at last, like her life,— her ears strained for a call in the next room, which seemed so very long in coming to the wondering, impatient little listener. She was half jealous of the people inside there. Nobody had as good right as she by Hardy's side at this time.

Ah, if she had known what had been going on inside that room during the last hour!

But at length young Whitmarsh came out. "Come, Berry," he said, and she sprang up without a word and went back to her brother's bedside. She put her cheek, her warm little cheek, down to his cold one. "You know who it is, Hardy?"

"Yes, I know it's you, Berry," and a smile came up slowly into his eyes, — a tender, loving smile, — but already the light was waning in them.

"And — and — you feel better now, don't you, Hardy?"

He made a great effort, girding up his soul for the last words, which he knew she would carry through all her life to come: "You mustn't take it hard, Berry, what's comin'. You've been a good little sister al'ays; I might have been a better brother sometimes — "

"No, you couldn't, — you couldn't either," she sobbed out passionately.

"Well, never mind now. We've al'ays loved each other. Poor little Berry! — you'll remember what I say now about not feelin' bad?"

She knew what he meant now, — knew it in the spasm of agony which doubled her up like a dreadful blow.

"O Hardy, say anything but that. I can't let you go, — oh, I can't!" she cried out, as human love does cry when it stands face to face with Death.

His dying eyes strained at her again; a spasm of pain convulsed the stiffening features: "It's hard on you, I know, Berry, — poor, lovin', kind little Berry! But you'll be a good girl and have better times than you ever had before."

"They won't, they won't be good times without you, Hardy," she sobbed out again with a kind of passion of love.

"It'll seem hardest at first. But, Berry, there's a good God, and he knows, and I'm not afraid to go to him. You'll remember, sir, what I said about her?" his eyes turning suddenly in search of young Whitmarsh.

"As I hope for God's mercy when I lie where you do, Shumway," the other answered.

A last smile upon the white lips.

"Kiss me, Berry, good-night," he said, his voice dragging fainter and slower in his throat.

She put her wet face down to his, her warm lips to his stiffening ones, until at last the doctor's hand drew her away. "Come, my child," he said. He knew that Hardy Shumway would never speak to his sister again.

Then it came upon her suddenly, with all its awful meaning, that Hardy was gone, — that in all the wide world he would never speak to her again, she would never see his face, — never listen for his coming home at night. You know what such moments are, for in our great griefs we are all of one kin; you know that dreadful wrench of some hour in your life, when there was nothing left to you in the wide world but the face of your dead and the awful aching of your heart.

Poor Berry! but out of the memory of your own sorsow you can best interpret the child's first agony!

Dr. Avery bore her out of the room in his arms, laid her upon the bed, and gave her a soothing draught, and did not leave her until she had fallen asleep. Then he returned to the dying man and took his place among the watchers, the Whitmarshes, and Miss Carruthers, who could not be prevailed upon to return to her chamber.

Overhead there was the thick shining of the stars, and beneath them, the moaning of the winds among the shrubberies; and somewhere about midnight, so softly that those about him could not tell the moment, without sign or token, the human life of Hardy Shumway, with all its burden of faults and mistakes, of failures and sins, lapsed into the eternal.

"God be merciful to us sinners!" said Dr. Avery, closing the eyes of the poor workman, who, in all his life, had never lain in such state as he did in his death.

After a brief consultation, Dr. Avery and Benjamin Whitmarsh had both arrived at the same conclusion. There was no necessity now for discovering to the world the crime of Hardy Shumway; no ends of justice to be attained by making his confession public. And then there was Berry, and the promise they had given that her brother's memory should always be clean in the poor child's thoughts. This was easier, because the chief accomplice in the crime was lying now in the stillness of southern seas, where the storm hurled him down one night with his guilt on his head.

It seemed as though poor Hardy's words had come true of Blatchley: "There's judgments! there's judgments!"

Amidst all the strong emotion which young Shumway's confession could not fail to arouse in the soul of young Whitmarsh, the latter kept recalling the Duke's words to the Provost in "Measure for Measure": "All difficulties are easy when they are known."

It seemed hardly credible, when you came to think of it, that for weeks the most skilful detectives in the country — men whose power for hunting out a criminal amounted to genius — had been on the watch at Tuxbury without finding the smallest clue to the assassins, when the chief one, a stranger too, had come and gone unsuspected in their midst. It was not so singular that no suspicion had attached to Hardy Shumway. He bore a character for honesty among the workmen. His crime

His crime was an exceptional deed in his life, and there could be no doubt that idleness, poverty, and suffering had well-nigh crazed the young workman's brain, and made him the easy tool of a hardened villain.

It was singular enough, too, that when the detectives failed, the suspicions of the Tuxbury people had not naturally been drawn toward the old sailor, who came among them a stranger without character or credentials of any sort.

During those days which followed the robbery, Blatchley must have borne his share in the talk and excitement which ran so high through the town; and the old ruffian, no doubt, simulated well the excitement and wrath which he must have found on every tongue and read in every face.

It is true, young Whitmarsh did not know, at this time, what he afterward learned from Dr. Avery, who skilfully cross-questioned the Coyles regarding their former lodger, that it had suited Blatchley to enact the role of a semi-invalid during most of the period he had loitered around Tuxbury.

How much of this illness was real no mortal could ever know. That sometimes it was assumed was clearly evident from the fact that the man had walked to the adjoining town, at least eight miles distant, and returned, while the family where he lodged supposed him too ill to leave the house.

It was almost incredible, too, that nobody in either town had observed the man or crossed him upon the country road during that journey; but such appeared to be the case, and Blatchley had, both in coming and going, chosen the least frequented highways.

The sailor, too, must have managed very adroitly when neither his entrance into the bank alley nor his exit had been observed, for had this been the case suspicion must have inevitably fastened on him; but he had managed to elude both police and towns-people.

Dr. Avery and young Whitmarsh had, as I said, both arrived at one conclusion. It would be better to acquaint the latter's brother and sister with Hardy Shumway's confession without delay. Nobody else need ever know it; but the dead face, under their roof, and the life which he had not spared, to save Marjorie Carruthers, would plead more eloquently for Berry's brother, in the shock and horror which must necessarily follow the first knowledge of his crime, than any words could.

An hour after midnight they had come together in the library, — Mr. and Mrs. Whitmarsh and Ben, with Miss Carruthers and Dr. Avery.

"Well, Ben," said the doctor, "it's your place to tell them."

"I wish you'd do it for me, doctor. It's hard to drag all that up against the poor fellow, remembering how he lies in the next room."

"What do you mean, Ben?" cried his brother; but then Dr. Avery commenced talking, and for a while John Whitmarsh asked no questions. In a half hour both husband and wife knew Hardy Shumway's confession from beginning to end. For a while, with the dead lying in the next room, and the living he had died to save before her eyes, that tender-hearted little Eleanor was harder than her husband

One awful night last winter rose up vividly before the woman. She remembered the limp, senseless figure of her brother-in-law as the men had brought him in and laid him upon the bed. She saw Marjorie standing there, with her white face, holding Death at bay.

"I shall always think he came so near being your murderer, Ben. If he had lived, we should only have thought him fit for the gallows."

"That's true, Eleanor. It was an awful crime, and he's paid for it awfully," added her husband, his feelings swaying between wrath, horror, and pity.

Marjorie Carruthers went over to Mrs. Whitmarsh. "Eleanor," she said, "do you know, I should be lying right in that poor fellow's stead to-night if a great remorse had not worked all this time in him?"

"I know it, Marjorie," throwing her arms around the girl, as though she would shield her from some menacing evil. "I know that, — oh, thank God for you and — and you have forgiven him, and it was Ben he would have killed!"

"Yes; I have forgiven him, Marjorie, for Ben's sake."

The young man came over to them all. Dr. Avery saw there was no need of his speaking now.

"Think of the cold and the starvation and the misery hunting him down day after day, week after week, John, and think if Eleanor had stood in the place of that poor child upstairs!"

"God knows what I should have been driven to do, — God only knows," said John Whitmarsh, looking at his wife. He was a man of strong self-control and few words usually. You knew that speech must have been wrung out of his inmost soul.

"I think if I had known before," continued Ben Whitmarsh, "I should have felt a great pity for the man; but now, whatever wrong he did me, he has more than atoned for it here;" and he laid his hand on Marjorie's shoulder. "Her life, dearer than my own, — is not that price enough for him to pay?"

"Yes, Ben," answered his brother, in a broken voice; "you and I will forgive him, Eleanor, for Marjorie's sake."

She was the last to say it, this little, generous, tender-souled woman; but when she did, it was sobbed out from her inmost heart upon her lips: "Yes, Ben, for Marjorie's sake, for yours too, I will forgive him."

Then Dr. Avery knew that his time had come. He slipped forward. "We must remember, too," he said, "that life was sweet to the young workman, the life he gave up in one moment, and there was his little orphan sister to leave behind him."

"She shall never suffer, — never so long as I have a roof over my head or a loaf to set on my table," cried Mrs. Whitmarsh, her face glowing almost fiercely behind its tears.

"That's right, Eleanor! We'll take charge of the poor little friendless thing," answered her husband.

"The child belongs to us — Marjorie and me," said Ben Whitmarsh, simply.

Just then the dawn began slowly to lift its gray face upon the distant hills. Through the eastern windows of the library they all turned and saw it.

"What a night it had been!" they all thought, but Benjamin Whitmarsh thought also of the doctor's words. They were true. The dawn was shining into the windows too, where Hardy Shumway lay, but his eyes did not turn to welcome it.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was May again at Tuxbury, and close on June came a week of that rare, delicious weather when the earth, that has staggered and struggled through her long storms and snows, sings afresh the triumphant song of her thousands of springs, — the old earth smothered and reeling amid the laughter of her leaves and blossoms.

These days are very busy ones at Tuxbury. Something is going on there, and everybody's face carries a grand secret, and looks wise and happy over it; but for all that, secrets of this kind have a wonderful way of oozing out, and everybody in Tuxbury knows that a wedding is close at hand, under the roof of the long, low stone house, with its pretty piazzas and balconies.

As for Berry Shumway, so eager and pleased over the happiness of her adored Miss Carruthers, you would know this little girl of ours at the first glance; still, her face has rounded out a good deal from the brown, peaked face which met Marjorie Carruthers one cold afternoon so long ago in the road.

The loss of Hardy did not crush the girl. The youth was too strong in her veins and her soul for that. It was a terrible grief to her, — one that in some sense she will never get over, — for Hardy was her brother, the last of her kin, and the heart of Berry Shumway was tenacious as it was tender.

In the first fresh bitterness of the girl's grief over her brother's loss, it seemed to her that she only had one wish — to go and lie down close by Hardy's side and sleep there without waking.

But, in one way and another, life came back and called softly and pleasantly to Berry Shumway, and her soul could not choose but answer.

Then kind and thoughtful friends were all around, to soothe and comfort her — new friends, it is true — and for a little while the new life was strange and bewildering; she was shy and unused to it, and wanted to be alone with her grief or with Miss Carruthers. The Whitmarshes took the child home at once, but perhaps even Marjorie herself had borne a smaller share in waking Berry out of the first stupor of her grief than the baby had done.

The little fellow took to her at once, — any baby would, for that matter, — and she had a wonderful fondness for children, and they gave him up pretty much to her care. It was just the best thing in the world for her, taking her thoughts away from her own grief. The boy had no regard for that, as older people would have done, and he brought her his playthings, and in his imperative childish fashion insisted she should mount his rocking-horse and set his files of painted tin soldiers in marching order; and one day the old merry, happy laugh rang out of her lips when the boy strode suddenly up to her with a fierce martial air, his officer's cap aslant on his curls, and his wooden sword pointed menacingly at her.

She looked around, startled and half accusing herself at the sound of her own old laugh, remembering where Hardy was lying in the dark and stillness, and feeling that she had no right to be happy now; but afterward she remembered his last words to her; she knew that Hardy would have been glad if he could have been there to hear.

It is a sound, healthy nature, you see, to the core,—no morbidness nor superstition wrought up in it.

After this Berry's merry, twinkling laugh came to be a very natural sound in the household, everybody smiling to hear it.

Berry Shumway has changed, too, in many ways. It could not be otherwise with her quick, absorbent nature, brought in constant contact with people of the highest breeding and culture. Naturally bright and assimilative. the little factory girl has shed her old manners and habits in a wonderful degree, catching unconsciously the finer speech and ways of those about her, without losing the groundwork of her native simplicity.

Miss Carruthers, too, has aroused in her a strong love of study, and Berry is happy over the prospect of attending the academy in the adjoining town next year; she being the especial protégée of young Whitmarsh and Miss Carruthers. One of these days their home is to be hers also, when the new, stately house on the hill, in the midst of its ample grounds, shall be completed.

"It will quite put our little gray nest to shame, John," gayly laughs that happy little Eleanor.

"Ah, dear, if the mistress under that roof will only be as happy as she has been under yours!" answers Marjorie, with a smile, half playful, half serious.

So, one morning, the sun shines in at the open windows, and the song of birds and the fragrance of blossoms come in there too. There is a general atmosphere of stir and preparation about the house. The excitement extends outside too, for even the mill-hands are to celebrate the bridal of the young master with a holiday. The family have just come from the breakfast into the sitting-room in a merry mood.

"I hope day after to-morrow will bring us just the splendor of this morning, Marjorie," says young Whitmarsh, glancing at the sunshine and dews outside.

She smiles at him, — a smile half tender, half serious, — one of the smiles which, with her, always float over great seas of thought: "I hope so, Ben."

Then Mrs. Whitmarsh sparkles up: "Where in the world am I to bestow all the people who are to arrive here to-night and to-morrow? That is the question at present uppermost in my mind, to which Ben and Marjorie, like lovers from time immemorial, are absolutely oblivious."

"You ought, however, to thank me, Eleanor, that I did not consent to your sweeping the whole circle of our acquaintances with your invitations. In that case we should have been obliged to turn the woods around Tuxbury into a Forest of Arden, and our guests must have camped there," laughed Marjorie Carruthers.

While this play of wit goes on about her, Berry Shumway stands at the window, but her gaze has gone out of it; yet she does not mark the quiver of morning winds in the leaves, nor the glitter of dews on grass and flowers. Her face, rounder and prettier than it used to be, has still its old, honest look, only just now it is very serious amid the general hilarity, which Berry's native spirits usually relish keenly.

Miss Carruthers comes over to the girl's side: "Berry, you were sober at breakfast, I noticed. Is anything the matter, child?"

"Oh, no, Miss Carruthers, — at least not much."

After that ambiguous reply she comprehends Miss Carruthers' smile: "That was not much of an answer either, Berry."

"I had a dream last night. It is very foolish, but I can't joke it off."

"Let me help you, Berry. What was the dream about?"

"It was about somebody you never heard of; his name was Blatchley, — Dick Blatchley, I believe."

The child did not observe how everybody in the room started and grew still at that name; so, half speaking to herself, she kept on: "He was a dreadful bad man, Miss Carruthers, although I don't like to say so much about him when I think how he was drowned one night in a dreadful storm at sea. But he had a bad face, the worst I ever saw in my life, and he used to come to our house sometimes, that winter of our trouble. Poor, dear Hardy never liked him, I know, or he wouldn't have been so delighted when old Blatchley went off; but the old sailor had no end of stories and sea-yarns, and sometimes they helped Hardy away from his thoughts; and perhaps they would me, if it hadn't been for the oaths and the man's dreadful face.

"It came back to me last night, Miss Carruthers, just as I used to see him, and it seemed as though I was at home again, standing by the kitchen-fire, and the man was before me with his coarse, blotched face and his thin yellow beard, and said something, — I couldn't make out just what, only he seemed to have something to tell me. 'He did it,' he said, — 'him and me; but it won't do you any good to know, and I shall al'ays keep, mum. Anyhow, it turned out better than I've expected.'

"Of course it was only a dream, Miss Carruthers, but I woke up all of a tremble. It was just that man's bad face; for the words couldn't have meant anything; but the dream clings to me;" something troubled and doubtful in her voice, which was not just like the clear, prompt ring of little Berry Shumway's.

"I'd try and forget all about it, child," Miss Carruthers managed to say. "It's never best to trouble one's self over dreams; shake it off."

"Well, I will, — that's a fact," said Berry, decidedly. "Whenever I was in any trouble I always found the best way to get rid of it was to go straight and do something to help somebody else who was worse off than I was."

"I don't know as we shall answer your description, dear child," laughed Miss Carruthers; "but at all events you can go out and gather some flowers to dress the mantel. Nothing like sun and air for shaking off cobwebs of dreams and all such nonsense out of our brains;" thinking it best to turn off the whole matter with a jest to Berry. "Here comes baby, too, to help you, just in the nick of time," as the spoiled darling of the household toddled into the room.

"Yes, baby, we'll go this very minute," said Berry, with her old animation, and she ran for her hat; but she was a little surprised, when she returned with it, that Miss Carruthers herself took it from the girl's hands and tied it on, smiling in such a soft, tender way, although she did not speak one word.

"She's just an angel," murmured Berry to herself as she took the little boy's hand and they set out together.

Berry little guessed what talk went on inside for the next hour. It was not singular that this strange dream had greatly impressed the people. Not one, however, was superstitious; the great dread with all being, lest in some dream at night or whisper by day Berry Shumway should get a clue to her brother's crime.

"It would kill the child, — it would certainly kill her," said Marjorie Carruthers, pacing across the floor. "Poor little Berry!"

Yet, with the exception of Dr. Avery, no human being outside that room recked of Hardy Shumway's confession; and Berry had learned long ago that the attack on young Whitmarsh was a matter never spoken of in the household, and never alluded to it herself.

The elder brother spoke now, bringing to this subject the weight of his strong, practical sense: "Ben, Marjorie, Eleanor, let us dismiss the whole matter. We will do the best we know how for Berry, and we will leave this mysterious dream and all that may come of it with God."

It seemed as though the whole household had grown to talk and think of God since Hardy Shumway's death as it had never done before.

Young Whitmarsh came over to Marjorie's side, and she knew, though he did not tell her, that he was thinking of that day when she had come so near being lost to him, and of the poor fellow's arm which had staved off the death that made ready for her that moment.

Outside in the sunshine and dews Berry Shumway was humming among roses and tulips and all the flowery miracles of May.

"It's a nice world, you and I think, -- a very nice world, don't we, baby?" she said, filling the dimpled hands with blossoms; and the child crowed and chattered out there in the light and gladness, it never entering his small head to doubt whatever his companion said.

The dream began to slip out of her thoughts as low, cold vapors slip off from mountain sides, before warm sunshine; but her heart was unusually soft that morning, and it did not let go those words about somebody not so well off as herself.

Suddenly Berry remembered Jane Coyle, her old companion at the Mills. How long ago it seemed since Berry worked by her side, at the looms, in the dust and noise, the perpetual thud and clatter of the machinery!

Jane was there, at her old place, just as ever, but Berry and she had hardly exchanged a word for a long time. Sometimes in her drives with Dr. Avery, — for he often called for her when he had a long jaunt to some patient, — or when she was out with some of the Whitmarshes, Berry had come on her old companion, trudging along the roads just as she had done a little while ago, although her old life began to seem to Berry ages off by this time.

The girl always leaned eagerly out of phaeton or gig to recognize her former work-fellow, but of late Jane had hurried on with only a slight, hasty nod, which hurt Berry a good deal, although she comprehended perfectly well what lay at the bottom of it, and that Jane fancied her old factory friend had grown proud and distant with her better fortunes: "They were making a fine lady of Berry, who would scorn one of these days to have anything to do with the workpeople over whose heads she had been set so high."

The Mills were not more than a couple of miles off. Berry, familiar with the working hours, suddenly recollected that Jane would leave at noon on this particular day.

If she could only meet her on the road home, and they could have a good old-fashioned talk together, and Jane could learn that Berry's heart was precisely the same, "not one bit set up" since they two worked side by side at the same loom, old memories of pleasant walks and sunny noonings crowding thickly upon the girl, and making her heart yearn toward her old companion.

When Berry Shumway set her heart on doing anything, small obstacles, you may be certain, did not, with her, stand in the way of its accomplishment. She took it into her head to start off that very morning and intercept her old work-fellow on her return home. She made a choice bouquet of moss-roses and tulips of crimson and gold, and then, without saying a word to anybody, she set out on the road to the Mills.

They came upon each other, — the two girls, — just where the highways sloped down to the meadows, beyond which lay the Settlement of Tuxbury, — a lonely place; but to-day there lay beneath them, on the right, the wide, green, lush meadows with the sunlight upon them.

The factory-girl was no little surprised at coming thus upon her former work-fellow. She flushed a good deal, remembering she had on her old pink working-dress and her leather boots, while Berry wore a handsome striped piqué and a pair of pretty morocco gaiters; and you know what all these things are to girls and women.

"O Jane, I'm so glad to see you!" burst out Berry. "I came away here on purpose, and I've been gathering the nicest bouquet I could, all for you;" and she held out the rich, blooming mass. Jane put out her hand, too amazed yet to be certain she was really glad, but she was thoroughly ashamed of her dirty cotton glove, with the ragged finger-ends.

"Thank you, Berry. It's beautiful," half shyly, half stiffly.

The truth was, Jane Coyle, though a good-hearted, good-natured girl at the core, had been not a little soured and envious over her former work-fellow's prosperity. It was the most natural thing in the world, for the contrast between their conditions was very sharp now, and of just that kind to make one sore, whose nature was not very broad and very sweet. An elevated, ideal soul would, no doubt, have striven against all this; but Jane Coyle was nothing of that sort.

Most people, too, would have thought her prettier than Berry, with her soft, brown skin, — too brown for freckles, — and her bright black eyes, and the smooth black hair around all.

"I'm glad if you like the flowers, Jane, I took so much pains for them," continued Berry, not noticing her companion's shyness or stiffness. "I've wanted to see you ever so long, and have a talk over the old times when we worked in the Mills, and used to eat our dinners together on the window-seat. What nice times we used to have!—didn't we? Do you remember how you always broke your slice of gingerbread in two for me? What gingerbread that was! Nobody's will ever taste so good again."

A pleased smile came out on Jane's face. "Ma'll be tickled, you better b'lieve, when she comes to hear that," she said.

"You must be sure and tell her, Jane; but, oh, dear! you and I have so much to talk about, now I've really got hold of you! How many times I've thought of you sitting on the window-sill, eating your dinner all alone! and I've wondered whether you didn't miss me sometimes, and wish Berry Shumway was sitting by you too, just as she used to. Is the little robin's nest in the tree, I wonder? and have the birds come back to sing there this spring?"

Jane Coyle had been staring at Berry and snuffing at the bouquet during this talk, her pretty face growing bright and pleased all the time. She broke right out now with her native impulsiveness: "I declare if you aint jest the old Berry Shumway you used to be at heart! I thought you'd be so set up, now you'd got among all those grand people, you'd never want to remember old times nor common work-folks."

"Oh!" said Berry, "I thought you knew me better than that, Jane. I didn't suppose you'd get any such foolish notions into your head, whatever other folks might think. Come, let's go and sit down on the rock here, and have a good chat together." Jane went. How mean and contemptible all her little envies and suspicions looked now to the factory-girl! She had a warm heart, and it had loved her old playmate and work-fellow.

It was a pleasant place where they sat, on a great gray boulder, one side of the road, the warm noon-sunshine all around them, and a little way off a great wooden trough under a spring in the rocks, the cool humming of the little stream winding its silvery air through their eager talk.

Of a sudden Jane flung her arms around her companion, her face flushed and working: "Berry, it does seem real good to see you. Them's the beautifulest flowers I ever saw in my life; and to think you went to work and picked them all for me! I'm ashamed of myself for ever having any bad thoughts about you; but you know, Berry, I al'ays liked you better than any other girl in the world. I did so."

"I know you did, Jane. Never mind the thoughts. They are not worth talking about, and maybe in your place I should have had just the same."

So they sat there, with the sunshine about them and the cool humming of the spring on their right, and had their talk, — foolish, girlish talk, it might seem, if I were to write it down here in a book; but perhaps it did better work than wiser speech often does; at any rate, you may be sure that Jane Coyle will never forget that hour, — it left a sweetness in the factory-girl's memory long after the beautiful flowers she held in her hand that morning had perished.

When they rose to go at last, Berry said, "Oh, how is Lake? You must tell him I haven't forgot how he carried you and me home that day, on the sled, in the snow-storm."

Jane laughed out. "O Berry, wasn't it fun?" she said.

"Yes; and, Jane, you must come and see me one of these days."

"O Berry, I never could," looking half frightened. "Among all them grand folks! I should be scart to death."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't either, when you came to know them, and how kind and good they are. I shall see that you come some time, Jane. Now, good-by;" and the girls kissed each other, and went their way in the pleasant noon-sunshine, with the green gush of leaves all around them.

"Hallo, Berry!" shouted somebody down the road, and, looking up from a very brown study, Berry caught sight of the well-known gig, and the brown mare and her master. Each seemed to belong to the other.

The girl ran fleetly down to them: "I am so glad to see you, Dr. Avery!" and there was a cordial shaking of hands.

"Jump in, child. For once I'm not in a hurry."

Berry was not loth to take her place by the doctor's side, and there was no lack of talk between them, — talk over the beautiful day, and the people at Tuxbury, and the wedding close at hand; bright, merry talk for a while, which slid at last into a graver vein.

"What a brown study this little girl was in, up the road there!" said the doctor. "I had to shout two or three times before she heard me."

"You did, doctor?" turning on him one of her surprised looks. "I was very busy, just at that time, thinking."

"I saw that. What kind of thoughts, Berry?"

They were easily drawn out to her old friend. She went over the whole interview she had just had with Jane Coyle, showing up the scene in her bright, graphic way.

When she was through, the doctor was silent a moment, switching the green flies off Pluck's shiny, brown sides; at last he turned, and their eyes met.

"You were a good girl, — a very good little girl, Berry," laying his hand on her knee. "You did just the right thing."

Her eyes thanked him: "I wanted to do something good to-day to somebody who was not so well off as I."

"What put that into your head, child?"

"I don't know, unless it was the dream I had last night."

"The dream?"

"Oh, I forgot, doctor! You don't know about it. I mean the dream about old Blatchley."

"Old Blatchley?" Dr. Avery's face did not change a muscle.

"Yes, — that old sailor who was hanging round here a long while ago, and who stayed with the Coyles. He was a bad man; but he was drowned the next time he went to sea."

"I've heard of the man. I think I passed him once or twice on the road. But what had he to do with your dream, Berry?" his tone the most natural in the world.

Then Berry related her dream to Dr. Avery, word for word, just as she had to Miss Carruthers that morning.

Again, when she had finished, the doctor sat a while silently, switching the big flies off Pluck's sides. The girl little imagined what was going on in his thoughts. At last he said, "So something very pleasant and good has grown out of the bad dream. That is the way to look at it, Berry."

"Yes, doctor, it doesn't trouble me any more now, and —"

"Well, Berry?"

"I was thinking, coming up the road just now, that perhaps there was a good deal I might do for the folks in the Mills. You know I've lived among them and worked with them, and I understand their ways and feelings, their joys and troubles, just as nobody else could who had never been right down where they are, — one of their number.

"It struck me, all of a sudden, that I stood between these poor people I had left, and the rich ones to whom I had come, and that there were many ways in which I might draw both closer together, and make each understand the other a little better.

"There's money always ready, and there's hearts always tender over any trouble, up at the house; but their lives have been so different from the work-people, — they seem a great way off, you know. It's the *living* things makes you understand. Ah, doctor, I wish I could say better what I mean."

"You have said it well enough, Berry. I have seen the true and noble purpose blossoming beautifully out of your bad dream, as the leaves and flowers of to-day have blossomed out of mould and darkness. Ah, my child, you have seemed in my thought to stand in some half-way house on a mountain-side, and the rich are on the heights above, the poor and ignorant on levels far below you; but both shall come where you stand, little maiden, and you shall interpret the heart of the one class to the other. It is a good work, — I bless you to it, my child."

They had reached the gate at last. It was dinner-time now, and they always held the doctor fast when they got him inside the house at Tuxbury; so he was predestined to a seat at the table.

After the meal was over, they managed to find some excuse to get Berry off with baby, and while the two were having a high frolic in the other room, Marjorie commenced: "Dr. Avery, I must tell you about Berry's dream last night."

"No need, my dear; I had it all from her own lips less than two hours ago."

"You did? About old Blatchley and all that? It is most unaccountable and mysterious," said several voices.

"Yes, my friends, it is all that." Then Dr. Avery went over with all that had passed betwixt Berry and himself during their drive that morning. His audience listened breathlessly. How impressed and touched each was with Berry's interview with her former work-fellow, I leave you to imagine. It was a time when all their hearts were unusually soft.

"So, my friends," concluded Dr. Avery, "we won't look at this dream on its abnormal, superstitious side; only at the good which God has brought out of it for Berry, — for all of us, I trust, — as he has brought this day out of the winter and the rains and the darkness."

Dr. Avery said a good deal more which his hearers will not be likely to forget; then he had his jokes with the predestined bride and bridegroom and went his way.

Late that same evening, Marjorie Carruthers went to the front door, and stood there a moment looking out on the night. It was fitting the day it closed, — a night into which the stars wheeled with solemn splendors their golden lines, amid which floated, large and royal, the beauty and glory of the May moon.

Thoughts crowded thickly upon the beautiful woman as she gazed, — thoughts that slipped over the wide spaces of her nights at Tuxbury, halting at the thresholds of mighty griefs and joys.

She remembers the night when they carried her lover — her husband that is to be — through the door where she is standing now; and she remembers that other night, when they carried another across the same threshold, — a limp, breathless mass; and one was given back to life and to her love, and the other to darkness and the grave and to God.

She remembers, too, that summer night with the stars and the moon overhead, like this one, when young Whitmarsh told her first of his love, and how in her blindness and madness she thrust it away with scorn and wrath. She remembers, too, that other night by the terrace-walk, when God dealt with her better than she deserved, and she learned what this love was which she had thrust from her.

The splendid eyes are smothered with tears as she stands there alone, with a faint quiver of night winds in her hair. Inside, there is a blaze of light, a confusion of merry voices, for a part of the expected guests are already arrived, and to-morrow will be full of the mirth and excitement which seem to make the native atmosphere of a bridal. In a few moments young Whitmarsh comes out and joins the bride-elect on the threshold.

He sees the tears in her eyes, but the smile that comes through them answers his question before he has had time to ask it.

"Ah, Marjorie, how good God has been to me!"

"How good he has been to me, Ben!"

Then his gaze and hers go off to the tower looming black and huge against the stars and sky and moon; and the same thought rushes upon them both. There is a green grave in the new cemetery, and if he who lies there to-night had failed her once, Marjorie would have filled another grave to-night. Neither speaks of that now, but they are both silent a while, thinking.

At last Marjorie says, "I think your work and mine lies there, Ben, among those people," glancing off to the great red glare of the Furnace. "How many hearts and homes we can help! how much good we can do! I have been thinking it all over since I learned of Berry's talk with the doctor to-day."

"So have I, Marjorie. This lifting up these poor, coarse men and women and children into a smoother, higher, happier life is better than all our old dreams of luxury, of study, of pictures and books and dilletanteism. Ah, the years shine wide and bright before me to-night, — the years with you, Marjorie; but there is work in them for the poor and lowly, — work for you and me to do over there in the Mills, — the Mills of Tuxbury."

"Yes," she said, softly; "it seems as though God's hand pointed the way and work."

"It is late," he said, "and the night dews are heavy; you must come in now, Marjorie."

And she went, only stopping once to look at the night, and off at the great, looming, sooty mass of buildings, with the red glare of their fires, and murmuring to herself again, — "The Mills of Tuxbury! The Mills of Tuxbury!"

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